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THE JUSTIFICATION OF ANDREW LEBRUN

BY
FRANK BARRETT

AUTHOR OF 'KITTY'S FATHER,' ETC.



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THE JUSTIFICATION OF ANDREW LEBRUN

CHAPTER I.

THE STRANGE COVENANT OF NICOLAS VAN DER HOËL.

ONE morning I read in a Sunday newspaper this curious advertisement :

‘**T**O EXPERIMENTAL CHEMISTS AND CLOCKMAKERS.—
To be disposed of, on extremely favourable conditions, a freehold property, consisting of a house and garden, situated in Weaver Street, Spitalfields. For cards to view and further particulars apply personally to Messrs. WHETSTONE and FARRAR, Solicitors, Crutchedfriars.’

As my master, Mr. Andrew Lebrun, was both a clockmaker and an experimental chemist, and then desirous of leaving Clerkenwell for his daughters’ sake, I cut out this advertisement and took it to him when I went to business on Monday morning.

‘It’s an odd thing,’ said he, smiling, as he laid down the slip of paper. ‘I doubt if there are half a dozen clockmakers in London who dabble in chemistry—so much the better for them, perhaps.’

‘I thought, sir,’ said I, ‘that as there is a garden, the house might please the young ladies.’

‘A garden in Spitalfields!’ he observed, raising his eyebrows and shaking his head sceptically. ‘I fear they would gain very little by changing Clerkenwell for that quarter. Still’—taking up the advertisement and glancing at it again—‘those “extremely favourable conditions” are a great inducement.’

‘There can be no harm in looking at the place.’

‘No; and we must leave this house at quarter-day. I will go and see it, John, and you shall go with me; for the business concerns you, and you are a better judge than I whether any trade is to be done there.’

And therewith, to despatch an irksome duty at once, he called Thérèse down and bade her mind the shop in our absence, and we went off to the City together, Mr. Lebrun and I. We found the firm of solicitors in Crutchedfriars, and my master having told the clerk that he wished to see the property in Weaver Street, we were, after some little delay, shown into the inner office of Mr. Farrar.

Mr. Farrar, a short, stout, clean-shaven, shrewd-looking man, of about fifty, was writing at the table. He cast a penetrating glance at us—or, rather, at my master; for beside him I was too insignificant for observation—and said in a genial tone:

‘Take a seat, gentlemen. I will speak to you directly.’

He finished his letter, and then shifting his chair so as to face my master, he said pointedly:

‘You are Mr. Andrew Lebrun, I presume?’

‘Yes,’ replied he. ‘This is John Grey, my friend and business manager—my factotum, indeed.’

Mr. Farrar nodded, without shifting his regard from my master’s face—less from rude indifference than from the subtle fascination which my master’s face exercised upon most observers.

He was a strikingly handsome old man, with his noble forehead, his long visage pointed with a short gray beard, his dark, deep-sunk eyes, calm and tender, with the patience that accompanies reflection and study, yet lustrous with latent passion. The thinness of his nostril, the curve of his lips, the form of his mouth marked him as a man of refined and sensitive disposition—a man to be respected, to be loved and feared as well.

‘A clockmaker and a chemist also?’ said Mr. Farrar interrogatively.

‘A clockmaker by necessity, a chemist by instinct.’

‘I’m afraid you make very little by your chemistry, Mr. Lebrun.’

‘Nothing.’

Mr. Farrar nodded, with a look of kindly compassion in his face, as if he read in my master’s furrowed cheek the history of years and years of fruitless experiment; and then, shifting his chair and assuming a more business-like air, he said briskly:

‘Well, sir, our client is very anxious to sell this house in Spitalfields, but the conditions under which it is to be sold are so peculiar that it is only by the

greatest hazard that we can hope to sell it at any price. The value of the ground alone is eight or ten thousand pounds; but if a suitable purchaser can be found, he may get it for a few hundreds.'

'I could not afford to pay more than a few—a very few—hundreds.'

'Ah! Well, there is this agreeable contingency—that you may possibly have all the purchase-money returned to you within ten years, so that you will have obtained a property of eight or ten thousand pounds for absolutely nothing.'

'May I ask what constitutes a suitable purchaser?'

'Yes. In addition to his being a watchmaker and experimentalist, he must be a man of blameless character. I know your objection, Mr. Lebrun,' he added, raising his finger as my master smiled. 'You would say that morally an absolutely blameless man does not exist. But the definition is not of that exacting kind. It is necessary only that the purchaser should have an unblemished reputation.'

'I can answer for that, sir,' I ventured to say.

'It is also necessary that this honest man should pledge himself to perform a certain covenant connected with the transfer. Annexed to the house is a laboratory, which has been closed for a hundred years. The purchaser must promise to open this building, and in the cause of humanity and science to faithfully carry out the written instructions nailed upon a bench within.'

'A very peculiar provision,' observed my master.

‘Very. The man who made it was a clockmaker and a natural philosopher,’ returned the lawyer with a quiet smile. ‘To explain the position clearly I must tell you something about him. He was a Dutchman, named Nicolas Van der Hoël, and he bought this house in Spitalfields towards the end of the last century.

‘By his selecting that quarter, then chiefly populated by French refugees—Huguenots and others—it is probable that he himself was expatriated—possibly for being a natural philosopher; for even at that time, as you know, experimental chemists were regarded less favourably than they are at present. A man who used an alembic was regarded with suspicion, and if he made any discovery beyond the intelligence of his neighbours, it was attributed to infernal agency.

‘In 1792 Nicolas Van der Hoël died. He left a will, bequeathing the house in Weaver Street to a legatee, whom we will call John Doe, and his heirs, on condition that for a hundred years it should be let at a rental of £20 per annum to “honest clockmakers,” and that at the end of that time it should be sold according to the stipulations I have already indicated.

‘During these ninety-nine years the laboratory at the back of the house was not to be opened on any pretext whatever. On infringement of these conditions John Doe was to forfeit the property, and the house was then to go to another legatee—Richard Roe, we’ll say.’

‘If the house was to be let, how could John Doe

guard against the laboratory being opened by his tenant?' I asked.

'By taking very good care to select honest clock-makers for tenants,' replied Mr. Farrar, smiling, 'and imposing stringent conditions upon them. As the place is worth double the rent fixed by Nicolas Van der Hoël, Mr. John Doe has found no lack of applicants, and has had the good fortune to keep conscientious tenants.'

'Is it not possible, sir, that curiosity may have led someone to open the building and close it again surreptitiously?'

'It is possible, of course; but I think it more probable that no one has entered that mysterious laboratory since Nicolas Van der Hoël closed it, and I shall try to show you my reason for this belief. Not content with these provisions for guarding his secret a hundred years, Nicolas Van der Hoël took another and a more extraordinary measure.

'By his will he commanded that the furniture and personal effects contained in the house should be sold, the sum realized to be deposited in the bank of Messrs. Grote and Grote, who, a hundred years ago, bore a reputation scarcely less honoured than it is now. Previously, as he states in an appendix to his will, Van der Hoël had apprised the bankers of his intention, and folding a piece of water-marked paper in their presence, he punctured his signature with a pin through the doubled paper.

'He then tore the paper in half, and, giving the bankers one portion, told them that they were

to pay the sum to be deposited in their bank after his death to the person who presented the duplicate half, which he took away with him. Out of this fund an annual dividend of 1 per cent. was to be paid to the second legatee, Mr. Richard Roe.

‘The object of this ingenious arrangement was obviously to put a second safeguard upon the secret of the closed laboratory. But the subtle Dutchman goes farther than that. He puts another embargo upon both legatees by giving the bankers a reversionary interest in the fund. For if it can be proved that the person presenting the duplicate signature is in any way connected with either of the legatees, all claim to the fund shall be forfeited, and it shall become the property of Messrs. Grote and Grote.

‘Do you follow me, sir?’ asked Mr. Farrar, turning to me, for it was evident by my master’s wandering attention that he took no interest in this part of the affair; indeed, in pecuniary matters Mr. Lebrun was as simple and indifferent as a child.

‘I think I understand you,’ said I. ‘There is reason to believe that the counterfoil, by means of which the fund now lying in the bank can be claimed, is to be found in the closed laboratory. Neither of the legatees has any temptation to secure the paper, since they are debarred from using it. On the contrary, both are anxious to keep it closed—John Doe because his prospective property goes over to Richard Roe in case of infraction, and Richard Roe because he loses his yearly dividend as soon as the fund is claimed.’

‘Precisely ; and for that reason you may be sure that the representatives of Richard Roe will do their best to prevent the house being sold. I have thought it best to explain this fully, because if you present yourself as a purchaser, Mr. Lebrun, you must expect a searching investigation into your past life on the part of this legatee’s solicitor.’

‘I have no reason to shrink from that,’ said my master quietly. ‘The main thing is to find if the house is acceptable to my children as a home, and suitable to Mr. Grey as a place of business. I, for my own use, shall be glad to open the laboratory, but as for its secret and its papers and the rest——’

He shrugged his shoulders significantly.

‘May I ask, Mr. Farrar,’ said I, ‘what amount was placed in the hands of Messrs. Grote and Grote after the sale of Mr. Van der Hoël’s effects?’

‘A little over fifty pounds.’

‘Fifty pounds!’ exclaimed my master derisively. ‘There seems here to be much ado about nothing.’

‘Your business friend, sir, knows better than that. By the simple force of lying there at accumulative interest, the mite of fifty pounds has grown into the monster of a million ; and Mr. Richard Roe’s dividend, which for the first year was no more than half a sovereign, is now worth ten thousand pounds.’

‘Ah, yes,’ said Andrew Lebrun carelessly. ‘I did not think of applying mathematics to such an affair.’

‘Well, sir, now that you know the conditions, are you still desirous of seeing the house with a view to purchase?’

‘Yes; if Mr. Grey thinks it suitable, and it is within my means, I will buy it.’

‘There will be no difficulty about payment. My client, Mr. John Doe, cannot let it after the expiration of ninety-nine years, and must keep it closed, paying rates for nothing, if he does not sell. And, as I have shown, the difficulty of finding a purchaser against the opposition of Mr. Richard Roe is so great that any offer on your side will, I am sure, be accepted. My clerk shall fetch a cab and take you to view the property at once.’

‘I am afraid it won’t do, John,’ said my master, as we went out to the cab.

‘We shall see, sir,’ said I quietly. But I vowed in my heart that if it were the veriest ruin, I would induce him to take it, seeing him already, in my mind’s eye, the possessor of that slip of punctured paper—a millionaire, and my dear young ladies, Thérèse and Daphne, no longer forced to pinch and scrape in order to make ends meet.

CHAPTER II.

THE HOUSE IN WEAVER STREET AND THE CLOSED LABORATORY.

WEAVER STREET is a quiet turning out of Church Street, Spitalfields. The houses are all old, and chiefly occupied by salesmen in the adjacent market.

Some pigeons were strutting in the middle of the roadway, and there was an air of quiet gentility in the neighbourhood which pleased me, as I thought of Thérèse and Daphne, for here they might go out dressed as they pleased without being subjected to the coarse pleasantries to which the factory girls that swarm in Clerkenwell treat anyone whose manners and appearance differ from theirs.

And I was not less pleased when I looked about me with a business view. ‘They must be good, solid, old-fashioned, respectable people who live here,’ thought I—‘families who would scorn to have two-and-ninepenny alarums in their rooms, or carry ten-and-sixpenny watches in their pockets; folks who are willing to pay a fair price for a good article and sound workmanship.’ And the look of the clockmaker’s shop, before which we stopped, strengthened this opinion.

It had a long, low, bow-fronted window, glazed with queer little panes of glass of a greenish tint, doubtless as old as the century, showing what careful tenants had been found for the house—all very brightly polished, and displaying a select stock of goods on the two shelves behind.

‘I can have my working-bench in the window there,’ said I to myself, ‘and go steadily on with my repairs without being disturbed from my occupation by little blackguard boys tapping at the window to make faces at me when I look up.’

On the façade over the low bow-front was written ‘George West, clockmaker.’ I wondered if we should have the good fortune to paint that name

out, and put 'Andrew Lebrun' in its place. It seemed almost too much to hope for.

We descended two steps to enter the shop. It was very spacious, and even to me (clockmaker though I am) there was something awesome about it—my thoughts running now upon the mystery of the closed laboratory. The walls were black with age, and, by reason of the low front, the light was dim and objects obscure.

From three sides the many clock-dials stood out like ghostly faces; the movement of the pendulums was scarcely visible, so that the combined ticking of so many escapements seemed to come from nothing. One could fancy a score of bodiless spectres chattering their teeth in terror.

But these grim ideas were dispelled by the sight of a fine cat asleep on the counter, and Mr. West in his shirt-sleeves and a white apron sitting with his back to the light, reading a newspaper. This gave a humanizing aspect to the place, besides speaking well for the business which could be conducted in such an easy manner.

'Good-morning, Mr. Evans,' said he, recognising the clerk, as he rose and regarded us over the rims of his glasses. 'What can I do for you to-day, sir?'

The clerk explained the object of our visit, and then Mr. West, going to the foot of the stairs at the back of the shop, called up in a thin, piping voice:

'Jenny, my dear, here's Mr. Farrar's young gentleman brought a party to look at the house.'

A thin, silver-haired old lady came down presently and led us upstairs, telling us on the way that she and her husband had lived there for forty years, and that they should be loath to quit their old home, but that they proposed to live with a married daughter in the country.

And this was understandable, for a nicer old house (in a city) it would be difficult to imagine. The rooms large, with plenty of light; comfortably furnished with real old furniture; not a speck of dust anywhere; the wainscoted walls neatly painted, and everything in good repair. The front windows looked on to the street; the back over a long garden, surrounded by a high brick wall, beyond which on three sides rose high stacks of wood from a timber-yard having its frontage in Brick Lane.

The border under the wall was planted with hardy shrubs and annuals—*nasturtiums*, *convolvuli*, and the like—and a fine mulberry-tree (probably planted by the early French refugees for the use of silk-worms) rose from the strip of grass that carpeted the space between the borders.

These things looked very fresh and bright after the late showers, and for that reason the more incongruous with the surrounding stacks of timber.

This was odd enough, to be sure; but my curiosity was piqued to a still greater extent by the closed laboratory, which I saw below from one of the open windows.

It was a solid rectangular building, some forty feet long by twenty in breadth and about nine in height,

annexed to the house, but leaving a considerable space on each side between the walls of the garden. The top was flat and covered with lead, a small chimney rising from the further end.

I could see no door, window or opening of any kind from above ; but when we went down into the garden, where I could inspect it more closely, I observed a long, narrow casement running all round under the projecting edge of the roof, protected on the outer side by an iron grating, and glazed on the inner side (as I could just see, standing back by the wall) with bottle ends, which would allow the light to enter, but screen the interior from observation.

By the depth between the grating and the glazing I reckoned the wall to be at least twelve inches thick, and it was solidly built of sound red brick.

The walls were partly overgrown with ivy, but I could find no trace of any entrance from the garden masked by the foliage. Nor was there any, as Mr. West assured us.

‘The only way of getting in is from the shop,’ said he ; and leading us into the house, he showed us the framework of a door filled in with brickwork in a recess under the staircase.

‘The Dutchman’s folly, sir, we call it,’ said he. ‘Old Nick’s folly some term it, for the man who built it was named Nicolas, you know ; but I call it the devil’s folly, for over and over again, when I was a young man, it tempted me to be dishonest, but happily I had sense enough to overcome the temptation, and now we’ve grown so indifferent that we

wouldn't give sixpence to know all the old Dutchman took such mighty pains to conceal.'

'Well, John, what do you think of it?' asked my master on the way home.

'It's an opportunity not to be lost—a real stroke of fortune!' I exclaimed, with enthusiasm. 'The young ladies will have a suitable home now. They will be happier there than it is possible for them to be in such a place as Clerkenwell.'

'That is the main inducement; but we must regard the pecuniary side, and keep within our means. Can we afford it?'

'Why, sir, the place is clearly to be had for a mere song, and what is to prevent your selling it for its full value when you have fulfilled the simple condition imposed by the vendor? You may make thousands of pounds by the sale, to say nothing of what you may find in the laboratory.'

'What do you expect to find there, John?' he asked, with a smile.

'What do I expect you to find, sir? Why, the counterpart of the paper deposited at the bank—a paper that will make you a millionaire!'

'If I thought that, I wouldn't have the house at a gift. No man should have so much money who has not the capacity to employ it properly. I should be the unhappiest man in the world with such responsibilities.'

'But there are the young ladies to be thought of,' I observed.

‘I am as thoughtful of their happiness as my own. For them—motherless, young, inexperienced—the calamity of being thrown suddenly into an unknown sphere, with its follies, indulgences, temptations, would be greater than my own.’

‘Well, sir,’ said I, fearing that his dread of these chimeras might lead him to keep the young ladies in Clerkenwell for the whole term of his natural life, ‘it may be that we shall find nothing in the Dutchman’s folly after all.’

‘Nothing,’ he returned, with conviction. ‘The fact of his making such a disposition of his effects proves that he was out of his senses.’

‘To be sure, sir,’ said I, for the sake of the young ladies. ‘You’re quite right, I dare say.’ But I did not think so at all; for the Dutchman’s will seemed to show an amount of foresight and calculation beyond the capacity of a madman.

‘Very good. And now, John, if we are to go on with this affair, I beg you to keep all speculations with regard to finding treasure entirely to yourself. I beg you to say nothing to my dear daughters to encourage hopes that may lead to disappointment, or render them discontented with their present position. Promise me this.’

I gave him my promise, and kept it so strictly that neither Thérèse, who might very well have been trusted with the secret, nor Daphne, who was more disposed to building castles in the air, knew anything at all about the piece of punctured paper which might make them inheritors of a million.

Well, my master bought the house in Weaver Street, and we moved in towards the end of September. I shall never forget that night when, having closed the shop—for I must pass over the details of intervening events, that I may come at once to the astonishing sequel—and made all necessary preparations, I took up a pickaxe and struck the first blow at the brickwork that closed the entrance to the laboratory.

It gave out a peculiar hollow ring, like that of a blow struck on the dome of a tomb. Andrew Lebrun stood near with his two daughters, for he was so fully convinced that the paper would not be found in the closed building, that he made no attempt to check the natural curiosity of the young ladies, who had learnt, of course, that the laboratory had been bricked up for a hundred years.

The night was close and sultry, and the perspiration ran down my face as I hammered and wrenched at the brick partition, but I did not mind that. I felt no fatigue—nothing but a devouring passion to get at the fortune which lay within reach ; and this exciting my imagination, I saw in every blow some new happiness for the young ladies.

‘There’s a lovely dress for Miss Daphne,’ said I to myself, as a brick came out, ‘and the most beautiful hat in the world,’ as another fell ; and then, as a great block tumbled into fragments at my feet, ‘there are books and pictures for Miss Thérèse—all that her heart can desire.’

Meanwhile, as a significant accompaniment, old

Andrew Lebrun slowly and steadily shovelled the débris aside as so much rubbish.

As soon as my pick went clean through I put my eye to the hole and looked through, but I could see nothing for the darkness beyond; and this was not to be wondered at, for, on enlarging the hole and getting through with a light, we found the passage barred by a door. A key (with others hanging from it) was in the lock. It grated and shrieked (as I thought) when my master turned it.

There was a second door beyond that, which we opened with one of the keys suspended to the first, and then at last we stood, all four, in the laboratory—the first living souls that had entered it for a hundred years.

We were all a little awed—except my master, who stepped aside to examine a curiously-shaped alembic standing on a tripod.

At the farther end of the laboratory stood the bench on which I expected to find the punctured paper. As we perceived at the first glance, there *was* something nailed upon it—drab with the dust of a century. It was a sheet of parchment. I blew away the dust, and found that the writing upon it was in Latin, and, therefore, unintelligible to me.

I wrenched out the nails, and was about to lift the parchment, when Andrew Lebrun laid his hand upon it, with a stern glance of reproof at me. Then he held it up to the light and began to read, but I looked about in vain for that half sheet of paper that was to make him a millionaire.

Meanwhile, the two young ladies were satisfying their curiosity ; but there was little there that they were not familiar with, having free access to their father's little laboratory in the old house. They laughed, and said they were disappointed in finding nothing so dreadful as they expected. I, too, was also disappointed—too much so to laugh.

Presently the girls went up to their father, who was reading the parchment, kissed him, and bidding me ‘ Good-night,’ left the laboratory to go up to their rooms.

I stayed there—dispirited and dull—looking in silence at my master, who, it seemed to me, was marvellously absorbed in the reading of the parchment. At length he finished it, and holding the sheet in his hand, fixed his eyes upon me with the strangest look imaginable. Though his eyes were on me, I believe he was unconscious of my presence, so deeply wrought was he by some inner thought.

‘ I don’t see any paper, sir,’ said I despondently.

He shook his head without replying.

‘ You were right after all. Nicolas Van der Hoël must have been a madman. A madman,’ he said, in a hushed voice, and with an abstracted expression, ‘ or the greatest discoverer that has ever lived in the history of man. . . Come away,’ he added, leading me towards the door, and then turning the key ; ‘ you must never enter this place again—neither you nor anyone else. Only I ;’ and then, stopping midway between that door and the next, he exclaimed, in a tone of the deepest awe, ‘ Great God ! if this be true——’

CHAPTER III.

THE VACILLATION OF ANDREW LEBRUN.

WHAT was there in the instructions left by Nicolas Van der Hoël to make such a powerful impression on my master? Nothing certainly that concerned the unclaimed million lying in the bank: no pecuniary interest could move him in that way.

It seemed to me more probable that the instructions related purely to some physical operation known only to Nicolas Van der Hoël—some chemical experiment begun by the Dutchman, and requiring the lapse of a hundred years for its completion—or it might be that Van der Hoël, having already suffered for his discoveries and fearing further persecution, had relegated to another century the exposition of a natural law which, in his epoch, would have been regarded as nothing less than a diabolical invention.

This view of the case was supported by Andrew Lebrun's saying that he was either a madman or the greatest discoverer in the history of man, and also by the elaborate safeguards he had put upon his secret—of which the latest evidence was the writing of his instructions in Latin—a tongue universally known to men of science, but absolutely unreadable to the ignorant mass of people.

'Well,' thought I; 'whether anything comes of this discovery or not, it's pretty sure to cost my

master more than he will ever get out of it, so I must work up the business well to keep things going ;' and with that I turned over in my bed and went to sleep.

About eight the next morning, as I was trying to make the shop presentable, Daphne came carolling down the stairs, as gay and light as a linnet. Her song ended abruptly as she opened the door and faced the heap of brickbats and rubbish from the doorway I had opened overnight.

'Haven't you cleared this horrid mess away yet?' she cried petulantly.

I cast an appealing glance at her and turned to the walls, where half my clocks were still swathed in dusters, to protect their movements from the dust.

'Oh, you poor John!' said she, in a tone of sympathy, relenting at once, for she was as changeful as an April sky, now threatening a storm, and now all promise of fine weather—as the natural brightness of her disposition broke through the transient cloud. 'However will you become your nice, tidy, prim old self again? Where's papa?'

'I have not seen him since last night, and I was down before six. He must be upstairs.'

'No; his room is empty. He must be in there,' pointing to the laboratory; and then, gathering up the fresh skirts of her morning gown, she exclaimed again impulsively against the horrid rubbish.

'Stay here, Miss Daphne,' cried I, quickly stepping to the closed door; 'I will call him if he is there, but I haven't heard a sound.'

I gave a loud rap, and we heard my master's sonorous voice replying from within—like a voice from the earth.

'I knew he was there. I am always right, you know, John. Tell papa when he comes out that breakfast is quite ready.'

She ran upstairs singing again, as the lock of the inner door grated dissonantly. I gave the message as Andrew Lebrun came out and carefully locked the second door.

He made no reply—indeed, I doubt if he could heed such a trifling matter then—but, grasping my arm, he led me a few paces from the stairs, his head bent in deep thought. I noticed that the furrows in his cheek were deep and the sacs below his eyes swollen, as if with intense application and fatigue; but the brightness of his eyes when he raised his head showed that his energy was undiminished.

'John,' said he, in a low earnest tone, 'can I get out of this bargain honourably—can I give up this house and that,' with a backward glance at the closed door, 'as I found it?'

'Give up this house!' I exclaimed aghast. 'It's impossible, sir; but you can sell it when you have fulfilled your compact to carry out Nicolas Van der Hoël's instructions.'

'That's what I shrink from—what I would avoid.'

'I don't see how you can, sir; you've signed a covenant to do it within twelve months. It's only a moral obligation, to be sure, for no one could ever know whether you had kept your word or not. But

if it did come out that you had failed to do so, legal proceedings might be taken against you.'

'But if I give up all just as it is, and offer a valid reason for retracting my promise?'

'A man like yourself, sir, might accept your reason; but we have to deal with lawyers—practical men, bound to do the best they can for their clients. You've paid your money, and they might very justly refuse to refund it; and then, sir, what is to become of the young ladies, we having laid out every available shilling in this purchase?'

'It isn't a question of money, John Grey,' said he, bending his shaggy brows; 'it's a matter of life or death.'

'That, to be sure, alters the case. It isn't to be expected that you should carry out a perilous experiment—which, maybe, Mr. Van der Hoël was too wise to hazard himself—at the risk of your life.'

'Not mine,' he said in a tone of abstraction; 'not my life.' And then, with awaking excitement, he continued, 'If it were only that, I would do it. The thing tempts me——'

'Why, in that case, sir, I'd certainly do it,' said I, anxious now to avert the disaster that threatened to ruin us all; 'for there's another consideration that we must not lose sight of—there's your reputation as a man who has never yet broken faith with anyone. Now, if you retracted, might it not be said that, having opened the laboratory and failed to find the punctured paper, you merely bought the house and signed the covenant on the chance of getting a fortune for nothing?'

‘You’ve said enough, John,’ said he in a more animated tone. ‘I have given my promise to carry out those instructions, and I will.’

Quiet Thérèse came to our side with her noiseless steps: she embraced her father and gave me a pleasant smile and word of salutation.

‘Father dear,’ said she in a tone of remonstrance, ‘the eggs will be quite cold.’

It was she who always stepped in to succeed when Daphne failed. Her nature was so different, she having so much self-restraint and undemonstrative resolution. Daphne would commence a hundred things, to discard them when her small stock of patience gave out. Then Thérèse would quietly take them up and complete them.

‘You must go down and fetch papa,’ Daphne had said, I have no doubt. ‘He will listen to you: he won’t to me; and John Grey is so silly with his movements and escapements, that he’s quite likely to have forgotten the message I gave him—an old stupid!’

We went upstairs to breakfast, for I was treated as one of the family rather than as a paid servant.

‘You look dreadfully worn out, papa,’ said Daphne, after kissing him; ‘have you been very busy?’

‘In my way, little one,’ said he, stroking her shining head gently.

‘Always analysis and things, I suppose?’

‘It hasn’t come to that yet awhile, Daphne—only just past the thinking stage,’ he replied.

That accounted for my hearing no sound in the

laboratory. Maybe he had been poring over Van der Hoël's instructions and pondering his responsibilities the whole night through. But clearly his dubitation was ended. His manner showed that. He talked with his children playfully, betraying a feverish excitement that caused Thérèse more than once to regard him furtively, with pensive solicitude in her dark gray eyes. To me he seemed like a gamester who, having thrown aside the last scruple, is prepared to stake his all on the next hazard.

It was a cheerful meal, and, indeed, dulness would have been incongruous with the pleasant surroundings. The windows were open to let in the sunlight and fresh morning air, not unpleasantly charged with the resinous odour of pinewood from the adjacent timber-yard. One could see the famous mulberry-tree, the stacks of sawn planks beyond, and the blue sky above.

The furniture had been polished as bright as hands could make it, the faded upholstery covered with new chintz, the old carpet turned about so that the worn part was scarcely seen, and then the eye rested with pleasure on the tablecloth as white as snow, the holes in it so nicely darned as to be imperceptible, the breakfast things neatly laid, the old spoons looking like silver. A finger-glass, with one or two nasturtiums from the garden, stood in the middle of the table; and there was Jane, the little maid from Essex, in a stiff print dress and white apron, bringing in a tray with the coffee, that gave out an appetizing fragrance.

And to come last of all to that which was first to give charm to the breakfast-room, there were Thérèse and Daphne—embodying all that is piquant and delightful in maidenhood. Thérèse, slight, dark, and delicate, with the head of a Clytie, with the same purity and refinement in the mould of her features, but lit with more intelligence, by reason of her fine, fearless dark eyes and the play of her lips animating the beautiful face; Daphne, exquisitely fair, with soft brown eyes, a dimpled cheek, an inconstant mouth, pouting in displeasure, only to smile the next instant in mirth.

Actually, Thérèse was only two years older than her sister—Daphne's twentieth birthday having been celebrated the day we took possession of the new house; but virtually the difference in their ages was far greater—Thérèse being a woman, Daphne a mere child—their characters being so opposite. Thérèse was thoughtful, self-contained, somewhat reserved; Daphne impulsive, demonstrative, and as thoughtless as a kitten, cruelly careless sometimes, lovable always by the perfect innocence of her intention. At a glance you could see all that was to be found in Daphne. Thérèse was an endless study, presenting ever-developing possibilities.

The gong on the shop-door sounded before we had finished breakfast. I ran down and took a letter from the postman. It was of an odd shape and an odd tint, with a crest blazoned in the left-hand corner; and it was addressed to Miss Lebrun.

'Aunt Barbara!' exclaimed Daphne, as soon as she

caught sight of the envelope. 'It's for you, dear; do open it quick, there's a darling.' And then, leaning over her sister's shoulder, she continued with growing excitement: 'She's coming here to see us, papa.'

Andrew Lebrun raised his eyebrows, with a shade of vexation on his face, foreseeing the necessary postponement of his experiment.

'Between twelve and one to-day! What a pity, Tess, your new dress hasn't come home! You'll lend me your silk blouse, won't you? I've torn mine with a horrid nail.'

'One o'clock is our dinner-hour,' observed Thérèse.

'Well, we must call it lunch, dear; and you must make something out of Mrs. Beeton. We can't offer Aunt Barbara that cold joint. You know how very French they are at Stamford Hill; and papa, dear,' coaxingly, 'you *will* put on your other coat, won't you?'

'Anything you like, my dear,' said he, in a tone of resignation, as he inspected the crest on the envelope with a cynical smile. 'A plumed helmet, to please Aunt Barbara.'

Aunt Barbara was a sister of the late Mrs. Lebrun. She had married a hard-working little gentleman named Mason, who, by dint of indefatigable application to business (he was a fruit salesman in Thames Street), had made enough money to enable his wife to live in a detached house on Stamford Hill, procure a crest for the family, and dignify their name by doubling the S, and calling herself Masson. She had never visited us in Clerkenwell, but occasionally

the girls were invited to Holly Lodge, from which Daphne invariably returned greatly impressed with the magnificence of Stamford Hill, and exceedingly discontented with her own condition.

It was hard to tell from her demeanour how these glimpses of high life affected Thérèse, she having so much self-command and good sense ; but I am inclined to think that they gave her also a distaste for a poor way of living, and the shifts to which we were put at times to keep up a decent appearance and make ends meet. For, reasonable as she was, Thérèse was not superior to certain weaknesses of her sex, and the very refinement of her disposition which might make her recoil from such vulgarity as distinguished the pretensions of Aunt Barbara, must also have made the necessary meanness of poverty repugnant to her.

She was the type of a born gentlewoman—a type that even the rough usage of adversity cannot efface. In this, as in other respects, she resembled her father, just as Daphne, I suspect, resembled her deceased mother.

‘And oh, John!’ exclaimed Daphne aghast, with a sudden recollection, ‘there’s that horrid mess you made in the shop last night. You must get it all cleared away, every bit of it, at once. Don’t wait a minute ; go at once!’ and then, turning to her father as I hurried off to carry out this command, ‘If we could only have a private door, papa!’

‘And a footman in silk stockings to open it to Aunt Barby,’ added he.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MARVELLOUS OUTCOME OF MY MASTER'S
EXPERIMENT.

I FETCHED a couple of labourers, who carried the rubbish away, and working with a will I got the shop into perfect order by half-past eleven; then I ran up to my room, hastily changed my dress, and in ten minutes was back again behind the counter with my eye on the corner of the street, and ready at any moment to start out and open the carriage-door for Aunt Barbara when she drove up. Upstairs, the young ladies had been no less busy, you may be sure.

Half-a-dozen times during the morning Jane hurried out of the house with a basket, and returned red, moist, and panting for breath; and when I went upstairs Daphne was rushing from one room to another with a duster in her hand, her fringe still in curlers, and an expression of wild despair in her face, as if she saw the impossibility of ever being ready in time. Nevertheless, as the clock struck twelve, she peeped round the corner of the stairs door smiling, her hair dressed in a Venetian style, standing out about her pretty head like a golden aureole, and of course wearing Thérèse's silk blouse.

She came down ostensibly to know the right time, but really I believe for admiration, of which she could never get enough to satisfy her, though, to be

sure, I never looked at her without thinking her the prettiest girl in the world, as she was shrewd enough to perceive.

Then, after all, Aunt Barbara did not come, and having postponed our meal till past two, we at length sat down to dinner without her, all somewhat vexed, but poor Daphne ready to cry with disappointment. We expected a message or telegram to explain matters, but evidently Mrs. Masson did not think it worth the trouble or the sixpence to excuse herself.

I saw nothing of Andrew Lebrun between meals in the morning and afternoon, for he kept in his room, having need of rest after his sleepless night ; but after tea, when even Daphne gave up all expectation of a late visit, he came downstairs and went into the laboratory, where he stayed until eight. Then as I was about to close the shop he came out. He had thrown off his coat : his sinewy arms were bared to the elbow. The apathy which had come with forced inaction was replaced by alert energy, and his manner was now as decisive and resolute as it had been vacillating when he left the laboratory in the morning.

To be sure, he was then worn out with mental fatigue, and now was refreshed and invigorated by the day's repose ; but that was not all : the change in his demeanour intimated, I thought, a new development of his ideas. It is possible that in the past two or three hours he had been making an experiment which proved some questionable point and banished all doubt and hesitation from his mind.

‘I must have some charcoal and a strong lamp,’ he said. ‘Is it too late to get them to-night?’

‘The shops in Union Street don’t shut before ten.’

‘Get me what I want, John. A lamp that will give a strong light and ready for use, and a bushel of charcoal. I will see to the shop.’

I went out and bought a lamp, which I brought home with me. With some difficulty I found a man who sold charcoal. He promised to send a bushel to the house when his son came in. Andrew Lebrun was silent and preoccupied during supper. He said not a word to the girls about his experiment, and I thought it advisable to hold my tongue. At ten o’clock the young ladies bade us good-night and went upstairs.

The charcoal had not yet come, and my master, having lit the lamp, asked me to go round to the shop and see about it. Just as I opened the door to go out the boy arrived, carrying the basket on his shoulder. Andrew Lebrun had gone into the laboratory with the lamp. I bade the boy leave the charcoal and call the next morning for the empty basket; then I rapped at the door.

‘Bring it in,’ called my master from within, when I told him the charcoal had come.

As I opened the door and dragged the basket in I expected to find the old man in course of making some experiment, but he was simply setting the lamp on a high tripod, from which it threw a strong light over the whole place. I saw no sign of any

operation—nothing seemed to have been moved from its place except a brazier, which had been set up for burning the charcoal, under the hood of the chimney.

The dust of a century still lay like a thick down upon everything that passed before my eyes, in the rapid glance I threw round; the cobwebs were unbroken. 'He hasn't troubled to move a thing or open a drawer to find the paper that would make him a millionaire,' thought I, as I withdrew. He closed the two doors behind me, and locked them one after the other, too absorbed in thought to wish me good-night even.

As I stood in the shop and heard the bolts jar in their rusted wards, an uneasy feeling crept over me—a fear of I know not what. Why had he locked both doors with such precaution? What was he doing in there, or about to do? I asked myself. The lowered jet of gas threw a dim light upon the ghastly faces of the clocks; their ticking seemed only to make the stillness more complete by the absence of any counteracting sound, and my uneasiness increased every moment I stood there, with that fear of unknown possibilities upon me.

I don't know why the idea of suicide entered my head, for Andrew Lebrun was the last man in the world who would destroy himself voluntarily. It may have been the knowledge that persons have killed themselves with the fumes of charcoal; and my master had said that this was a matter of life or death. Supposing he should be making some

perilous experiment that ended fatally ! If he cried for help how should I get to him, those doors being locked, and the laboratory having no other entrance ? The slow, heavy step of a policeman passing the house suggested that I could in emergency get his assistance, and that with the possible requirement of that help I ought not to go from the shop.

For the rest, I felt too excited for sleep, and, to confess the plain truth, I dreaded lying awake in the dark with the terror of imaginary catastrophes conjuring up weird and ghostly visions in my mind. I turned up the gas ; the full light dispelled a great part of my vague fears. Looking about me, I caught sight of a lever watch hanging on a hook, that had been left to clean.

‘ Well,’ thought I, ‘ if I am not to go to bed I’d better do a bit of work ’ ; so I sat down at my bench, got out my tools and began to take the watch to pieces. If you want to know what silence is, sit in the dead of night surrounded by ticking clocks. It sounds anomalous, but I assure you that when the ear grows accustomed to that one sound you seem to hear absolutely nothing. It is as if the ears were filled with lead. When I loosened the pin and the mainspring of the watch sprang out with a whirr, the noise seemed to stun me for the moment.

An hour had passed when the policeman again came down the street. I must have heard his footsteps when he turned the corner, for it seemed quite a long while before the heavy tread was close to the

house. He paused outside, then came to the door and knocked.

'Oh, it's you, sir!' said he, when I opened the door. 'I see a light, and bein' nigh on the stroke of twelve, I thought I would just see if it was all right, you know.'

'Yes, it's all right,' said I; 'I've got a pressing job on that must be finished before the morning. Good-night.'

He went on his beat and I returned to my work, after putting my ear to the door of the laboratory. I could hear nothing within at first, but presently the chink of a glass vessel told me that Andrew Lebrun was at work.

'After all,' I said to myself, 'this mysterious operation may be nothing more than the production of a new gas. Such matters may seem of tremendous importance to a chemist. There's nothing to frighten a man in that.' I thought of going to bed, but the sight of my tools prompted me to finish the job I had begun.

Yes, that must be it—a chemical experiment—nothing more. How often have weeks of studious labour on my master's part resulted in no greater triumph than the coloration of one colourless fluid by another! And yet that simple result seemed to him ample repayment for all his pains. And now my thoughts, being free from supernatural fancies, turned back to the past. I went back in recollection to the day when I was first apprenticed to Andrew Lebrun—when the young ladies were quite children,

and I but a lad of fifteen. With what a feeling of reverence Lebrun had impressed me from the very first, by his wide intelligence, his perfect equanimity, his justice and generosity.

When my mother fell sick and could work no more, he gave her back the premium paid for my apprenticeship, and from the day of her death took me into the house and treated me like a son, paying me for my work long before the time that payment was due—from the moment, in fact, that I became useful in my trade.

My recollections were at about this stage when a sound from the laboratory arrested not only my wandering thoughts, but every bodily function. I sat there with the movement in my hand and the tool raised, like one paralyzed—motionless, breathless, powerless to think or act. A sound had come through the stillness from the laboratory that filled me with consternation. It was a cry, but *not the cry of a single voice, but of two*—one high-pitched, the other low. As I regained my faculties, I ran to the door and listened, thinking that my ears had been deceived, fearing that Andrew Lebrun was in need of help.

Now I heard the sound of water splashing, trickling, and dripping, and then suddenly the muffled voice of my master—speaking, as I thought, to himself—but his words were rendered inarticulate to my ear by the interposing doors, and that was followed by a wild laugh, which again astounded me; for the laugh was high and shrill—not that of my master!

Then that higher voice spoke, and there was a sound like that of vigorous rubbing; and scarcely had my ears distinguished this when the lock of the door grated close to my ear. That brought me to my senses. What right had I to be listening there? I stood there feeling guilty and abashed as the door opened and Andrew Lebrun faced me.

'Ah, you are there, John,' said he, with no resentment in his voice. 'Don't be alarmed — there's nothing amiss. Fetch me a suit of clothes from upstairs; your own will be best.'

I ran upstairs and did as he bade me, mystified beyond expression. My master took the things from me and carried them into the laboratory, again closing the doors.

'This is no business of mine, whatever it be,' said I to myself, collecting my tools hastily. 'A good servant should be like a good watch to his master—to move or stop, to go faster or slower at his will. It isn't for me to question his actions, to exercise any sort of surveillance upon him. I ought to have gone up to my room hours ago. He shall not catch me at this game twice.' But just as I had turned out the gas and was about to go upstairs the door of the laboratory opened and Andrew Lebrun came out with the lamp in his hand.

I dropped my eyes, for it looked as if I were still playing the part of a spy; but involuntarily I raised them again the next instant, as that shrill, high-pitched laugh I had heard before sounded again now close beside me. A young man, dressed in my

clothes, was standing in the light of the lamp, and laughing in this wild, idiotic fashion, as he thrust his hands in his pockets and looked down at his legs.

And, to add grotesqueness to the superhuman effect of this apparition, the young man was perfectly bald.

CHAPTER V.

THE MYSTERIOUS VISITOR FROM 'T' OTHER WORLD.'

HE was not an ill-looking young man—tall and slight, with delicate, long white hands and an aristocratic cast of countenance, as I thought, by the thin, high-bridged nose, the short upper lip, and the somewhat projecting teeth; but it seemed to me that his face was marred by an abnormal falling away of the chin and forehead, which denoted moral and intellectual weakness.

These defects would have been less obvious had he worn a moustache and a decent crop of hair upon his head. Certainly they were more emphasized by the absence of any growth except his eyebrows, which were dark and finely marked. His complexion was colourless, his pallor adding to the expression of fatigue which characterized his face, despite the amusement he derived from the inspection of my trousers.

'Pray tell me, friend,' said he in a thin, high,

almost falsetto voice, still regarding his legs, 'what d'ye call 'em—these things?'

'Trousers,' replied Andrew Lebrun.

He repeated the word imperfectly, like a foreigner uttering a word he has never before spoken, adding that the word was as 'whimsical' as the thing.

'I wear them also,' observed my master.

'Egad, so you do!' said the young gentleman, with another laugh, as he looked at Lebrun. 'I give you my word I did not remark it, being so prodigiously smitten with my own appearance. Come, let's have a crust and a bottle; for after——'

Andrew Lebrun checked him abruptly.

'Let me give you a word of warning before you take another step,' said he. 'Let not a word of the past ever escape your lips. At every point in this new life you will face some new, undreamt-of thing. Conceal your astonishment, let no one suspect your ignorance of the world you are to live in, if you would escape being shut up as a madman.'

During this exhortation the young man listened calmly, making queer sounds with his tongue as he sucked his teeth. Before replying he spat something on the floor.

'Bit of t'other world in my teeth,' he remarked coolly; then, smacking Lebrun on the shoulder, he continued: 'You are right, old Zadkiel. Your counsel has entered here' (smacking his bald crown); 'you shall find me mum as the monument and wise as the serpent; 'slife they shan't chain me up in Bedlam, if that's the way you treat simplicity.'

‘I give you this warning, because if (as I suppose) you claim the fortune that has accumulated at the bank from the fund placed there by Nicolas Van der Hoël——’

‘As I most assuredly shall. Over a million there should be now. I’ve got the pricked paper—sewed up in the lining here,’ he whispered in triumph, raising an embroidered waistcoat he had held tucked under his arm, ‘and egad, they shall pay me for selling myself to old Nick!’

‘They will pay you, but mark—those who are deprived of their interest in that fortune may strive to dispossess you. Give them no opportunity to put you in a madhouse.’

‘Have no fear, Daddy Prudence ; but, Bedlam or no Bedlam, I must wash my mouth out, and so let’s have that bottle, for the love of Heaven!’

Andrew Lebrun led the way upstairs. In following him the young man paused to refold his antique waistcoat. Then I noticed that it hung heavily, the folds of the embossed silk clinging together, and that drops of clear liquid fell from it as he pressed it gently between his hands. I had heard the splashing and trickling of water in the laboratory ; but where had it come from ? That was as inexplicable as the presence there of this young man, for no water had been taken in there, and I had seen no vessel containing fluid of any kind when I took in the charcoal.

The light disappeared from the stairs, and now, standing alone in the shop, my wits began slowly to

return, and I asked myself what part I ought to play in this extraordinary affair. I had turned out the gas, as I have said, just before the laboratory door opened, and I was standing at the very back of the shop.

In turning to light the way for the young man, Andrew Lebrun had placed his body between the lamp and me, throwing me into complete obscurity; and there I remained during the subsequent brief interlocution, too stupefied and appalled by what I saw and heard to move or speak, or reflect upon my own position. It was not until they were gone from the shop that the spell fell from my senses.

What ought I to do? Should I tell Andrew Lebrun that I had seen him bring the young man from the laboratory, and unintentionally overheard what passed between them? or would it be wiser to say nothing of what I had seen and heard, and keep the knowledge I had obtained a profound secret?

Since nothing could undo what was done, and my confession would benefit no one, I determined to adopt the latter course, and hold my tongue; so I took off my slippers and crept upstairs to my room at the top of the house, passing the sitting-room on my way, where a chink of light under the door and the low murmur of voices within showed that my master and his mysterious guest were closeted.

I lay down, but it was impossible to sleep, for the endless speculations that chased each other through my mind with respect to the mysterious young man. How useless they were can be imagined, for what

theory could explain his existence? I would have wagered my life that he was not in the laboratory when I took the charcoal in. There was nothing there but the bench with its nest of drawers, the shelf running round the walls, an empty fireplace, and a collection of chemical vessels and appurtenances.

There were no means of entering the building except from the shop, and that entrance had been under my observation from the time Andrew Lebrun locked the door until he appeared with the young man. Lebrun had no instrument to open the ground if a cellar existed below it. The chimney was merely a funnel for carrying off the fumes of charcoal burnt under the hood. There was absolutely no way for a human being to enter the place.

How then had the young man come there?—for, supernatural as the whole business seemed, I could not doubt that he was a human being, and not a mere spectre. And even supposing that there was some subterranean or other way of communicating with the outer world, the mystery would not be all explained; for (taking one grotesque objection) it was clear by his requiring my clothes that the visitor had come without any, save a waistcoat of the last century. Yet, on the other hand, was it at all credible that he had been conjured into existence by means indicated in the instructions of Nicolas Van der Hoël? Reason forced me to discard that idea as preposterous.

An archaic ring in the few remarks made by this

mysterious being led me to ponder the possibility of his being Nicolas Van der Hoël himself, resuscitated by some unknown chemical process. But here, again, I was met by the same difficulty which precluded the theory of a living man being introduced from the outside; for clearly it would be as impossible to get a dead man into the laboratory as a living one.

The more I speculated the more outrageous each attempt to solve the problem became (for, indeed, it was not possible to conceive any explanation which was not subversive of reason), and these vain attempts maddened me like the unavailing efforts to escape from some monstrous creature of a dream, inspiring such awful terror as one might feel at the apparition of a second sun in the heavens. I was heartily glad when it was light enough to rise and divert my thoughts in the customary occupation of the day.

The house was perfectly still. I noticed that the door of the spare bedroom was closed as I passed: I saw no one until a little after seven, when my master came down. He paused at the door of the laboratory after greeting me; then coming to my side, he said:

‘There is a visitor in the house, John—the visitor for whom I required your suit of clothes last night. He will need things of his own before he leaves the house. Be good enough to find an outfitter and tell him to bring what is necessary; and,’ after a moment’s reflection, ‘if you can find a wig-maker, tell him to call as soon as possible.’

‘It’s rather early, sir, for tradesmen of that kind to open,’ said I.

‘There is no great hurry. Go when you think fit ; but the sooner the better.’

From the tone of these last words as he turned away I fancied that he had already taken a dislike to this mysterious visitor and wished him gone. He went into the laboratory, and presently returned with a bundle under his arm, which he took upstairs. I could not distinguish what it was he carried, but it looked like clothing of some kind. I went out soon after and executed my commissions. Andrew Lebrun was sitting down to breakfast with his daughters when I came home. As I entered, he said to Daphne :

‘My dear child, I can tell you no more about our visitor. Pray do not trouble me with any further questions.’

There was silence after this, but both Daphne and Thérèse looked strangely perplexed, and they were not less mystified by my telling their father that the tradesmen had promised to call before ten o’clock to take the visitor’s measure.

I had barely seated myself at my bench after breakfast when Daphne came down with unusual silence, and, approaching me, asked under her breath : ‘Who is it ?’

‘I can’t tell you, Miss Daphne.’

Then Thérèse, piqued by curiosity, came noiselessly upon the scene, her pretty eyebrows raised inquiringly.

‘He don’t know, dear,’ said Daphne; ‘he’s just as idiotic as he can be. He never does know anything, except about his stupid escapements and things.’

‘Papa is more taciturn than usual. It’s so strange—I never heard the bell ring last night, and, of course, it must have rung when this visitor came.’

‘What I want to know is, whether it’s a gentleman or a lady?’ said Daphne in a tone of desperate vexation.

‘I can answer that,’ said I; ‘it’s a gentleman.’

‘Then what in the world does he want with a flat-iron, and a powder-box, and curling-pins?’ she asked.

Then it was Thérèse’s turn to speak.

‘But those tradesmen you spoke about. What are they going to measure? You must know that.’

At that moment, happily, I was relieved from my embarrassment by the postman, who brought a letter for Thérèse. It was from Mrs. Masson, announcing that as she had been unable to come the day before she intended to call, if possible, this morning. The prospect of this visit and the necessary preparation it entailed drove the other visitor out of their minds for the time, and I was left to continue my work in peace.

CHAPTER VI.

A FORESHADOWING OF EVIL.

THE wig-maker, with a box, and the outfitter, with a large parcel, called soon after ten, and were taken upstairs by Andrew Lebrun; but clearly their customer was not easy to please, for after spending some time in his room they departed, carrying away the goods they had brought.

About twelve a brougham drove up to the door. I tucked up a corner of my apron and ran out to open the door. Mrs. Masson was alone, and, indeed, there seemed to be scarcely room in the carriage for anyone else, she was such a very fine woman, and so extensively fashionable in shoulder puffs and trimmings. She was very much powdered and very highly scented; and her age—well, I never could quite decide whether she was a very old young woman, or a very young old woman. Her features were pleasing, but the expression of her face was so freezingly dignified that it seemed to forbid any feeling but that of distant respect.

I think this was chiefly due to her living at Stamford Hill and keeping a brougham, and that, had circumstances compelled her to serve in a tavern, or drive about in a grocer's cart, she would have been what is called a jolly soul. Clearly she was fond of good living—so, perhaps, were her horse and her coachman, to judge by their hungry looks, only with

this difference—that she had all that she wanted and they had not.

Having asked if the family was at home, Mrs. Masson alighted from her carriage, gave some instructions to her meagre coachman, and sailed into the shop, where Andrew Lebrun and his daughters were waiting to receive her. Having greeted them with a patronizing air, she put up her gold-rimmed glasses, and, glancing round the shop, expressed her contentment that they were at last located in a respectable neighbourhood, and went upstairs with the girls, Lebrun staying in the shop with sombre resignation in his long, reflective face.

‘Perhaps, sir,’ said I, ‘as you have visitors to-day, it would be as well for me to dine out.’

‘Nonsense, John,’ he replied ; ‘there will be room at the table for you.’

‘The fact is, sir, that having lent my best suit to the gentleman who came last night——’

‘You will find your clothes upstairs in your room—if you think it necessary to change. You will dine with us as usual, John.’

‘Very good, sir,’ said I ; and presently I shut the door and slipped upstairs to my room.

As I passed the sitting-room I saw Mrs. Masson, with a slip of paper and a pencil in her hand, the girls beside her, looking a little damped ; as well they might, for Aunt Barbara was finding fault with everything that had given us so much satisfaction. The carpet, the curtains, the coverings of the chairs, nothing was good enough for her ; and as she passed

them under review, she jotted down the things that really must be bought in their place to make the home habitable. She was still at it when I went down—Thérèse only making a feeble opposition on the score of expense.

At one o'clock Jane came to say that dinner was ready. When I entered the dining-room Andrew Lebrun introduced me to the grand lady, who had her glasses up to inspect me.

‘This is our friend Mr. Grey,’ said he.

‘Oh dear; I must beg Mr. Grey’s pardon,’ said she. ‘I really mistook him for your shopman.’

‘He is a shopman,’ said Lebrun, ‘and an excellent workman and good friend into the bargain, Barbara.’

Poor Daphne coloured up to the eyes—being ashamed of me, I think, poor child; but Thérèse cast a glance, full of pride and satisfaction, at her father. By the look on Aunt Barbara’s face I fancied she was about to say something particularly unpleasant at my expense, but just then the door opened, and astonishment chased all other ideas from our minds as the mysterious visitor appeared on the threshold, in a powdered wig tied with a ribbon, satin breeches, silk stockings, a long-skirted coat, and the embroidered waistcoat I had seen in his hands the night before.

He had seemed to me overnight not ill-looking, but with this becoming wig, and in the picturesque costume of the last century, he looked positively handsome. Advancing with easy assurance, he

made a profound bow to the ladies, and raising himself to his full height said in a tone of perfect confidence :

‘ I crave your forgiveness for presenting myself in a costume that must appear to you strangely out of character with the times, but the ripple of ladies’ voices falling on my thirsting ear, I could keep my chamber no longer.’

‘ Andrew, pray introduce me to this gentleman !’ said Aunt Barbara.

‘ I’ faith, madam,’ said the gentleman with a light laugh, ‘ as my good friend here has not yet troubled himself to inquire my name, it may be easier for me to introduce myself. I am, ladies, Mr. Percival Somerset, and your most obedient, humble servant—a gentleman of Kent, who has had the misfortune to be waylaid and robbed by footpads, and the happiness to be rescued and brought hither by Mr. Andrew.’

‘ Footpads !’ exclaimed Thérèse, in a low tone of incredulity.

‘ Footpads, by my life,’ repeated Mr. Somerset, undaunted by the general look of astonishment on his hearers’ faces and the particularly gloomy frown of Andrew Lebrun.

‘ Permit me,’ he added gallantly, placing a chair for Thérèse, as the gaping maid set the dishes on the table. ‘ The affair was simple enough,’ he continued, taking the seat I offered him, as I bade Jane fetch another for me from the next room. ‘ Being at a masquerade in the City last night I

exchanged some high words with a gentleman there—the subject of our dispute was naturally one of your fair sex,’ turning with a bow to Thérèse. ‘Neither of us was disposed to eat his words, and day breaking and the company dispersing, we agreed to settle our difference without further delay at the point of the rapier, and for that purpose selected a quiet spot in Bethnal Green, where we could be sure of crossing our steel without obstruction.’

‘Bethnal Green! Why that is quite near here,’ observed Daphne.

‘Within a stone’s-throw; but, unfortunately, before we were free of the houses I was set upon by rogues, my chair overthrown——’

‘Do you mean a hansom cab?’

‘No, madam. My opponent, being a gentleman of the town, had his cabriolet, and handsome enough, to be sure; but I, being from the country, and keeping no equipage in the town, was compelled to have a chair; and, to make a long story short, these rogues setting upon me before I could extricate myself, got the mastery, broke my sword, rifled my pockets, and, doubtless, would have finished by cutting my throat had not this gentleman, hearing my cries, come opportunely to my rescue.’

‘Papa!’ exclaimed Daphne, ‘why didn’t you tell us?’

My master made no response, but kept his eyes fixed on his plate.

‘Since then,’ pursued Mr. Somerset, ‘I have been a prisoner in the chamber above, and here must I

remain—a not unwilling captive, I protest—until the tailor has cut his cloth to my liking; for 'tis impossible to go abroad in these clothes, and I have no friends living nearer than Sevenoaks.'

'I should have thought it would have been more expeditious to communicate with them,' observed Mrs. Masson. 'If you had sent a message at eight, when the post-office opens, your servant could have brought you all that you need by ten.'

'Pardon me, madam, you mistake the distance. If the messenger had posted all the way he could not have reached Sevenoaks before eleven—'tis not in the power of horseflesh to do it in less.'

'But you could have wired; and then there's the train to Cannon Street.'

It was now Mr. Somerset's turn to be mystified. However, covering his perplexity with a laugh, he declared that Mrs. Masson was in the right, and that he had never thought of the wire; but it was clear to me that he was absolutely ignorant of those two great inventions of our age, the railway and the telegraph. Shortly afterwards another incident proved how completely unacquainted he was with familiar objects of the present day.

A hubbub in the street below caused us to rise and go to the window just as a steam fire-engine dashed past at full gallop. Regarding it for a moment with a wondering eye, he observed carelessly that 'twas prodigious the rate at which our artillery charged at this day, adding that in our grandfather's time it would have taken a team of six

horses to drag a piece of ordnance no bigger than that at half the speed. From which it was obvious that he mistook the helmeted firemen for soldiers, and the burnished engine, with its funnel, for some new-fangled gun, carried end upwards.

I comprehended now the wisdom of the warning Andrew Lebrun had given Mr. Somerset the preceding night, for certainly no one could have listened to his discourse without thinking him bereft of his senses. Even Mrs. Masson, despite the respect impressed by a somewhat assertive air of superiority on Mr. Somerset's part, regarded him covertly from time to time with a pitiful expression, as if she feared that he was not quite sound in his intellect. Thérèse alone conceived a plausible construction to put upon the strangeness of his language and behaviour.

'Mr. Somerset is determined to keep up the character assumed with his costume,' said she with a smile.

'Egad, madam,' he replied; 'tis the only means I have to give countenance to my strange appearance, and I hold myself fortunate in having encountered one with the wit to perceive it.'

Soon after I went down to the shop the outfitter returned with the clothes he had taken away to alter for Mr. Somerset, and at three o'clock Mrs. Masson's brougham drew up before the door. Then presently I heard the sound of voices on the stairs and the rustle of Mrs. Masson's silk skirt, and the whole party came down. And now Mr. Somerset was

dressed in a light tweed suit of to-day, his gloves in one hand, and his hat in the other.

He wore a wig of light curling hair, fitting him so admirably that I should have believed it to be his natural hair had I not known it to be false. He carried himself with ease, despite the newness of his clothing, and looked not less a gentleman in this than in the courtly dress of the last century.

Mrs. Masson, bent upon carrying out the innovations conceived for the improvement of the house, had insisted upon taking one of her nieces shopping, and Thérèse had denied herself this pleasure in behalf of Daphne. There was yet another seat in the brougham, but this had been offered to Mr. Somerset the moment she heard that he must call upon his banker in Lombard Street.

Andrew Lebrun took his sister-in-law out to the carriage, Mr. Somerset lingering behind with Daphne to say good-bye to Thérèse.

‘You will permit me to take an early occasion to wait upon you?’ said Mr. Somerset.

‘We are always pleased to see our friends,’ replied Thérèse, offering her hand.

‘I am enchanted to believe myself included in their number,’ said he; and then, to the astonishment of Thérèse, he lifted her fingers to his lips with a profound bow. He turned and took Daphne’s hand to escort her to the brougham, but she, put upon her guard, withdrew her fingers and took his arm, ‘Not to look,’ as she said afterwards, ‘as if I were going to step a minuet on the pavement.’

As they went off Thérèse turned to her father in silent amazement. Mr. Somerset's present dress offered no excuse for his solecisms: they were only to be accounted for by aberration of intellect.

'Who is he, papa? You must tell me!' she said earnestly.

'He has told you himself.'

'But it is impossible to believe the account he gave. It could not be true.'

'It is easier to believe that than the truth, my dear child,' he added tenderly, passing his hand gently over her head as he looked into her eyes with a pathetic earnestness. 'If I thought it were to your advantage, I would tell you all I know about that man; but in the belief, the hope, that we shall see him no more, I think it better to be silent.'

'But if we do see him again?'

'Then, for Heaven's sake, shun him as you would evil.'

'You must tell me why—just as you would show me what is evil!'

'What can I tell you that will not shake the gravity of my warning?'

He reflected for one or two minutes, still regarding her with that sad earnestness, as though some foreshadowing of his beloved daughter's fate darkened his mind, and then, shaking his head, he concluded in a lighter tone:

'No, no, dear! Better believe Mr. Percival Somerset light-headed than think that your old father has lost his wits.'

CHAPTER VII.

HOW MY FRIENDS FELL INTO TROUBLE.

AN accident that happened to my brother at this time compelled me to go abruptly to New York, where he had lately established a business; and there I should have probably stayed to this day but that at the end of six months, when my brother was capable of taking the management of his affairs again, I received a letter from Thérèse Lebrun begging me to return to England, if I could do so without sacrificing my own interests or my duty as a brother.

Between the lines I read in this letter a confession of embarrassment and urgent need that decided me to leave my brother at once, despite his remonstrances and the inducements he offered to keep me with him; and truth to tell, I was glad of this pretext to rejoin my friends, for having lived with them best part of my life, they were more to me than my own flesh and blood, and certainly their welfare outweighed any consideration of pecuniary advantage to be attained by staying in New York.

And so one bright morning at the end of April I found myself once more in Weaver Street, my heart beating high with pleasurable expectations as I caught sight of the old shop, with its greenish panes of glass. But approaching, my spirits fell as I perceived that no assistant was working at the bench,

and that the show-cases were all empty ; and then opening the door and going down the steps into the shop, where I was accustomed to hear the clocks ticking all round me like so many crickets, there was perfect silence.

And, indeed, there were no goods in the shop, save a couple of Swiss clocks, worth nothing at all—mere wall ornaments, as we call them in the trade. This augured so ill that I began to doubt if the house was still tenanted, when a cheerful voice on the stairs cried :

‘ Oh, here’s dear old John Grey come back again, Tess !’ and sweet little Daphne rushed across the empty shop to welcome me, with both hands extended and her face radiant with happiness. I was almost tempted to kiss her in my joy, and truly I believe she would have forgiven me that offence, for her delight in seeing me seemed scarcely less than that I felt in this meeting.

Then, before we could get out one coherent sentence, Thérèse joined us, with sincere delight in her beautiful face and a welcome as earnest as her sister’s, though less effusive by reason of her greater self-restraint and calmer disposition.

‘ We’re just getting lunch ready ; come upstairs, John,’ said Daphne ; and then, clapping her hands as she regarded me, ‘ Why, you haven’t altered a little bit. Has he, Tess ?’

‘ Mr. Lebrun is quite well, I hope ?’ said I.

‘ Yes, quite well, thank you, John,’ replied Thérèse.

‘ He’s in there,’ added Daphne, dropping her voice

and indicating the laboratory with a nod. 'But I don't think we must call him till lunch is ready.'

'Dear me,' thought I, as I went upstairs, 'this doesn't look quite right. The young ladies with aprons on preparing lunch seems as if they could no longer afford to keep a servant. The stock all cleared out of the shop! no sign of business doing, and Mr. Lebrun wasting time and money in the laboratory when he might be doing something more profitable in the shop! I am afraid things have gone wrong.'

Thérèse, who was in advance, drew to the door of their little drawing-room in passing, but not before I had observed that the carpet was gone, and nothing there but the bare walls. Some articles of furniture were missing from the breakfast-room also, and the few necessary pieces that remained were new to me and much better than the old ones, which seemed oddly contradictory.

'We have had to part with our servant,' said Thérèse, 'so you must pardon us if we leave you now and then, to go in the kitchen.'

'Pray let me come in the kitchen, too,' said I. 'I am an old friend, not a guest.'

'Oh, John, we've been in such awful trouble since you left us,' said Daphne, as we entered the kitchen.

'Why, what has happened?'

'You shall know all about it after lunch,' said Thérèse. 'We must talk about pleasant things first. Tell us all about your voyage, and New York, and the people you met there.'

I fell in with her wish, and to conceal my own anxiety on their behalf, I chatted as lightly as I could about my experiences as the young ladies prepared lunch, I helping them where I could, and keeping them in good spirits until the table was laid. Then I went down and knocked at the laboratory door.

‘John Grey!’ exclaimed my old master, grasping my hand with affectionate warmth when he came out. ‘It’s like a good friend to come speedily when he is needed.’

He questioned me about my voyage and so forth as he locked the door, and then glancing round the empty shop, he laid his hand on my shoulder and said:

‘You see we have got into trouble—through my neglect and business incapacity chiefly—but it’s not a terrible affair. Supposing the freehold of this place is worth the sum intimated by those lawyers who sold it to us, we shall still be better off than we were a year ago. But I suppose we shall have to give up the house, which will be a blow for the girls, with their unhappy taste for luxuries. Still, they have been not altogether blameless, and this may be a timely check upon leanings that seem to me wrong for girls of their station.

‘Thérèse will show you how matters stand better than I could, and you will do the best you can, I know, to get us out of this muddle. So we’ll say no more about it now.’

Nothing more was said on the subject during

dinner. The fare was very poor—poorer, I think, than I had ever seen it on this table; and Daphne thought it necessary to make some excuse for it.

‘Why, my dear,’ said her father, ‘there’s as much as we can eat; and the cheese is delicious.’

Had there been but bread and water, he would have eaten with equal contentment. This was the nature of the man. And it was his philosophic spirit of resignation, the absence of any craving for material things beyond the mere requirements of existence, rather than callous selfishness, that possibly blinded him to the natural wants of less philosophic beings, and made him indifferent to their privations.

And the reverse of fortune had no more power to damp this spirit in him than water to wet a duck. He was to-day the same as he had been at any other time within the last twenty years. And Daphne, with her youthful buoyancy, and the hopeful belief that now I had come back all would come right again, was as gay and bright as a goldfinch over a thistle-bed. I, too, was happy, with a certain measure of confidence in my own ability to help my friends.

The only one whose face denoted change was Thérèse. She looked more serious than ever—older for the cast of anxiety upon her face. But yet I thought this pensive mood, harmonizing with the classical mould of her features, added to their refined dignity, and made her more beautiful.

‘I want a sovereign if you can spare it, Tess,’ said Lebrun, when we rose from the table. ‘There are

some materials that I must have;' and then he turned to continue his conversation with me about a new process of getting the aluminium out of clay, while the girls went up to the window to tax their poor resources for the pound.

'This is all we can find, dear,' said Thérèse, putting some silver in his hand. I offered him a sovereign, and he took it, as a matter of course, saying that Thérèse would repay it when we came to settle up the pecuniary affairs.

The girls were silent after he left us. Thérèse, seating herself, rested her elbow on the table, her chin in the palm of her hand, and fixed her eyes on the cloth with an expression of embarrassment in her bent brows. Daphne, standing hard by, twined her pretty fingers, and glanced from Thérèse to me with a look of distress and apprehension.

'Let us come to business at once,' said I. 'For I see you are in difficulties, and the sooner we find a way out of them the better.'

'It's all my fault, John,' exclaimed Daphne. 'I began it the day that Aunt Barby took me out, you remember—the day before you had to leave us. When she said we ought to have this and we ought to have that, and showed me all the beautiful things, I said "yes" to every suggestion, partly because I hadn't the courage to say no, and partly because I thought she intended to give them to us as a present. But the things came home and the bills were sent to papa, and, of course, we hadn't enough to pay them.'

‘After all, they could not have come to such a very great deal.’

‘Oh, but they did. Thérèse has got them all down in her book. Shall I fetch it, Tess dear?’

Thérèse assented; and when Daphne left us she said, in her quiet way:

‘We are all to blame—poor Daphne not more than myself or papa. We advertised for someone to take your place, and accepted the first who came without making proper inquiries into his character. That was a great mistake, and very foolish of us, of course.’

‘Yes, that’s what Aunt Barby says,’ interrupted Daphne, returning with the book. ‘But how were we to know? Mr. Jackson looked an honest man, and Aunt Barby could find no fault with him or us till it turned out that he was not honest. On the contrary, she praised everything that he did, and advised us to agree to his suggestions. And I think it is very mean of her to blame us now.’

‘Tell me what Mr. Jackson did.’

‘He seemed very anxious to increase the business, and found fault with the way we had managed it.’

‘So did Aunt Barby,’ chimed in Daphne. ‘Everything was old-fashioned and behind the times. It was quite through her that we persuaded papa to order all those things, Tess.’

‘We were anxious, too, to make a fortune. For you see, John, we took it in turns to spend a few days every week at Stamford Hill, and there we

met well-dressed people, and grew ashamed of our turned dresses. And then we began to make acquaintances in the neighbourhood, having the house nicely furnished, and feeling ourselves able to entertain friends.'

'Because the business increased wonderfully,' said Daphne, chiming in, 'so that Mr. Jackson had to have an assistant, you know. And every day the takings were larger and larger. Wasn't it exciting, Tess, to count up all the money at night-time?'

'This man Jackson had a large stock in from the dealers, I suppose, on sale or return,' said I, 'Mr. Lebrun giving a bill for payment at three months.'

'Oh, the window was full of lovely things. Aunt Barby spent more than fifty pounds in bracelets and rings. People came again and again for things—they were beautiful.'

'And sold at a low price.'

'We never suspected anything,' said Thérèse, 'for every night we found the takings balanced perfectly with the tickets taken from the things sold. But one day a gentleman, who had bought a gold chain the day before, came into the shop and asked how it was that we could sell our goods at less than the cost price. That made me think there had been some mistake, and I asked Mr. Jackson to show me the invoice. He said he had sent it back for an over-charge to be corrected.'

'That day a fresh supply of goods came in, and the next morning, when I came down, I found the

shop empty—just as it is now; and, of course, Mr. Jackson and his assistant have never been seen since.’

‘I understand. The rascals were content to sell the stock at half its value to confederates until the game became unsafe, and then they made off with what was left. What did your father do?’

‘Oh, he was not a bit angry with us,’ said Daphne. ‘He took all the blame on himself.’

‘That didn’t trouble him greatly, I’ll be bound,’ thought I.

‘Papa took all the money we had,’ began Thérèse.

‘And all that the man would give us for our furniture,’ continued Daphne. ‘Everything was taken away except the most indispensable things.’

‘All that he could realize he took to the dealers, and gave a “bill of sale,” I think it is called, for the remainder of our debt.’

‘How much is the remainder?’

‘Fifteen hundred pounds; and then bills keep coming in. Oh, we have been very, very extravagant, and thoughtless, and wrong!’

‘Why, my dear Miss Thérèse, you were justified in spending money, believing that your fortune was being made by the business. But, after all, matters are not so very bad. The freehold of this house is worth two or three thousand. The lawyers will soon help us to settle all outstanding bills. We can get a little stock together and start afresh, with a fair chance of winning back all that has been lost—in time.’

‘Oh, you dear old John!’ cried Daphne, clapping her hands. ‘I knew you would make everything all right. Why, Tess, we shall be able to go to Mrs Heath’s dance after all.’

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SECOND EXPERIMENT OF ANDREW LEBRUN

THEY went to that dance. They had dresses bought in their heyday of false prosperity, and the cost of a few flowers and a fly was a trifle that I could very well afford to pay. Their father raised no objection; indeed, at this time his secret studies seemed to engross every thought, and blind him to everything outside his laboratory, and I silenced the compunctious scruples of Thérèse by saying that though, to be sure, I had not yet started the business again or arranged affairs so speedily as I anticipated, things would undoubtedly fall into shape before long, and that the difficulties of their position would not be lightened by their denying themselves a little harmless amusement.

‘Go, poor children!’ said I to myself, as they smiled at me from the departing fly—two sweet faces in a foam of lace and swansdown. ‘Enjoy life while you may. This may be the last flash of sunlight that shall break upon your young heads for many a dreary day.’

For though I had spoken hopefully and kept a

cheerful countenance, I began now to despond of repairing the evil caused by Jackson's dishonesty, Andrew Lebrun's want of business ability, and (I must add) the mischievous influence of Mrs. Masson.

I had confidently expected, by raising money on the freehold of the house in Weaver Street, to redeem the bill of sale and refurnish the shop; but this hope was now dashed by finding from the solicitors in Crutchedfriars that a lawsuit was pending between the two branches of Nicholas Van der Hoël's legatees, which might result in the Weaver Street property being thrown into Chancery. It was clearly impossible to raise even a small loan upon the freehold until the question in dispute was settled, and when the case might be tried or how long it might drag out its course no one could tell.

With this uncertainty hanging over our heads I thought it inadvisable to restock the shop out of my own funds; for, thought I, the time is drawing near for the payment of Messrs. Levy and Dobson. We cannot meet their bill; they may seize the house and everything in it, and we shall have nothing to keep us from starvation.

So, though I took down the shutters every day and made a pretence of working at my bench, the shop remained empty, and now wore such a look of ruin that no one would trust me even with the cleaning of a half-guinea watch. Moreover, our little resources were drained for the daily requirements of life. To meet these I handed over my savings to

Thérèse, telling her that I had collected the sum for an overlooked debt, that the poor girls might be spared the humiliation of accepting a loan from me.

They did not need that addition to their trouble ; yet I fear that Thérèse saw through the deception, for she became more and more careful, checking Daphne's tendency to extravagance (though Heaven knows there was little enough scope for recklessness at this time), taxing her ingenuity to make ends meet, and her eyes grew more pensive, her delicate cheek noticeably thinner.

And now Messrs. Levy and Dobson (getting wind possibly of the impending lawsuit and doubting the validity of their bill) wrote to remind us that a settlement of their claim for £1,500 would be due at quarter-day, adding, as politely as circumstances permitted, that if payment were not made promptly they should take immediate possession and turn us out.

‘What are we to do, John?’ asked Thérèse, when she had shown me this letter.

‘I will go to Levy and Dobson and try to make some arrangement with them which will enable us to stay on until the property is sold,’ said I. But Thérèse was not to be deceived by the tone of hope I assumed. She knew me too well to believe that I had neglected any means of helping them that lay within my reach.

‘And if they should refuse, what then?’ she asked.

‘Why, then, Miss Thérèse, we must look about for another place. There’s a shop to let in Church Street. The rent is not very high.’

‘But we have no money—we can do nothing without money.’

‘That is true; but we do not want a great deal. Two hundred pounds would be enough to stock the shop and start us afresh, and I know we could pay it back at the end of a year with interest;’ and then I added after a little hesitation, ‘Don’t you think Mrs. Masson would lend us that sum?’

I had not much faith in Aunt Barbara’s generosity: but it seemed to me that in common honesty she was bound to aid us now, seeing that she had been partly instrumental in the disaster.

‘She knows our circumstances quite well,’ said Thérèse, shaking her head.

‘Oh, there’s nothing to hope for from her, mean old thing!’ burst in Daphne. ‘She does nothing but talk of her own difficulty in paying bills, as a hint that she cannot help us; and then she’s so unkind about poor papa. I think she’s quite pleased to think that he is in trouble.’

‘She has no sympathy with him,’ Thérèse explained; ‘she cannot understand his devotion to science and his contempt for worldly things.’

More reasonable people than Mrs. Masson might have shared this feeling.

‘Well,’ said I, ‘I’ll go and see Levy and Dobson at once.’

‘And I will go to Stamford Hill and appeal to

Aunt Barbara,' said Thérèse. 'You will get dinner ready for papa, Daffy.'

And so we both started off on this forlorn hope, and each, I think, with a conviction that we should fail. Indeed, it was but a farce to try to soften such obdurate creditors as Levy and Dobson, and they seemed to regard it as that. Nor were other dealers with whom I was acquainted more disposed to treat the matter seriously when I proposed that they should lend us money to start in business again.

I returned to Weaver Street, fagged out and dispirited, about four, just as Thérèse was stepping out of a hansom at the door. She carried a beautiful bouquet of flowers in her hand. It must have cost a guinea, and the cabman, touching his hat, drove off without waiting to be paid.

'Come,' thought I, 'this looks hopeful indeed! Aunt Barbara must have determined to do the thing handsomely to give her niece such a bouquet and pay her cab to the door. This shows how one may be deceived in judging people by superficial signs.'

Daphne had run down, seeing the cab drive up, and the two sisters were in the shop when I entered—Daphne, with the bouquet in her hands, was admiring it, laughing and questioning in a low voice all at one time, in her mercurial way; while Thérèse, with an unusual flush on her face, but yet with a grave expression, drew off her pale, close-fitting gloves, for she was dressed very well (as it became her) in the things bought when they believed they had the world on a string.

On seeing me Daphne ceased to speak abruptly, and regarded me in embarrassment. Thérèse, with more tact and self-possession, said :

‘ I have failed completely, John ; Aunt Barbara will do nothing for us, and I fear you have not been more successful.’ Then as I shook my head dolefully she turned to her sister, saying, with a sigh :

‘ Well, let us have tea, Daffy dear, and see if that will inspire us with brighter ideas.’

I followed them upstairs in silent perplexity, for something in her manner led me to think that Thérèse had found a way out of the difficulty. ‘ Could it be,’ I asked myself, ‘ that she had received an offer of marriage ?’ Nothing was more probable, albeit, I had seen no visitor at the house nor heard of any. The sisters must have found many admirers in their brief season of gaiety ; and this bouquet, the hansom, Daphne’s confused silence, all pointed to this solution.

But our talk at the tea-table was still of ways and means, and Thérèse seemed not less anxious than I to conceive an expedient for tiding over our present evil. Clearly, if she had received an offer of marriage from one with the means to give her a guinea bouquet, she had not yet decided to accept.

‘ Can we think of no one who could lend us a little money ?’ she asked, knitting her fingers on her knee and bending her brows.

‘ Why !’ I exclaimed suddenly, after a pause, and striking the table, ‘ how came I to overlook that ? There’s one who has certainly the means to do your

father a good turn, and return his kindness ; and I'll be bound he only wants asking.'

'Who's that, John?' asked Daphne artlessly, opening wide her pretty brown eyes.

'Why, that odd gentleman in the antique dress—Mr. Somerset, I think he called himself.'

Daphne coloured up to the temples and dropped her eyes, casting a sidelong glance at Thérèse, who, purposely (I think) avoiding her regard, met mine without flinching, not a muscle of her face betraying surprise or agitation. Blind then to the significance of their manner, I pursued, carried away by my brilliant idea :

'Yes, that's the name, I know ; for I remember reading more than one note in the New York papers about an eccentric millionaire who had suddenly sprung up in London society, no one knew where from ; and I said to myself at the time, "That must be our odd visitor with the embroidered waistcoat." Yes, yes,' I stammered, checking myself, lest I should betray a greater knowledge of the waistcoat and the paper sewed in its lining, and the inexplicable mystery that enveloped the existence of its owner.

'Yes, yes ; with a million of money he may very easily lend us a couple of hundred. I can find out his residence, and I'll be bound he'll remember me—and—and——' Again I checked myself on the point of adding, 'and the suit of clothes I lent him, which seemed to be the first garments he had ever put on since his creation.' Then to cover my broken sentence, I said, 'Have you ever seen him since then?'

Thérèse replied : ' Yes ; he came here once to see us, but papa told him he must not come again. He has a strange repugnance to Mr. Somerset—strange, because papa is never unreasonable, and always tolerant, as you know, of people's weaknesses ; so that, admitting Mr. Somerset showed some weakness of character at first—for his oddity might have been the result of intoxication—it is difficult to understand this antipathy.'

' It's a dreadful pity,' sighed Daphne, ' for he's awfully nice, and I'm sure as generous as anyone could be.' Her eyes wandered involuntarily to the bouquet that lay on the table.

' If you please, John,' said Thérèse, rising, ' you must not ask Mr. Somerset for money.'

She went upstairs, taking her hat, and Daphne followed, leaving me alone.

Just then I heard the key turn in the laboratory door, and Andrew Lebrun came up and entered the room with a slow, careful step, carrying something in his hand with such earnest solicitude in his movements and the strained expression of his face, that it might have been the greatest treasure in the world ; yet, as he passed me, seeming oblivious of my presence, I perceived that it was nothing but a blade of grass set in a pot of moist earth.

At the moment this seemed to me an absurdity which might almost have provoked the conclusion that the old man was demented, to devote such care to the safety of a worthless trifle ; but the thing took a very different significance when I reflected

that Lebrun had come straight from the laboratory, where, for the past fortnight, he had spent every hour of the day and many of the night. Had he created this blade of grass by the same means that he brought Mr. Somerset into existence? I asked myself.

Incredible as it seemed, I could hardly doubt it, as I looked at the old man seated before the window, his elbows on the sill, his face in his hands, gazing down in a kind of rapture upon the green shoot that he had set upon the ledge where the sunlight fell. I drew near with a sentiment of awe to examine the thing closer.

‘Do you think it lives?’ he asked, looking up at me and then down again at the blade of grass, as if he sought to detect its growth.

‘Is it rooted?’ I asked.

‘Yes, yes; the roots are down there. To-morrow will prove whether they live and exercise their functions. Give me something to drink, John,’ he added, speaking hoarsely.

I gave him a cup of tea. His fingers trembled as he took it from my hand, and his teeth rattled against the edge of the cup as he drained it.

‘You have made a discovery, sir?’ I cried.

‘We shall see to-morrow,’ he replied, turning again to contemplate the blade of grass. ‘If it lives, a discovery to enable men to defy Death and Time. Not mine alone, John—I’ll not rob the dead Dutchman of his honour. Nicolas Van der Hoël is my partner. I pay him reverence, though he would hide his secret in the grave!’

CHAPTER IX.

THÉRÈSE TAKES A BOLD STEP.

THERE was something contagious in Andrew Lebrun's enthusiasm. It fired my imagination, and I said :

‘Is it possible, sir, that your discovery may be turned to commercial advantage?’

‘Likely enough, likely enough,’ he replied carelessly. ‘The noblest discoveries have been turned to base uses to gratify men’s avarice.’

‘It would be a great thing,’ I ventured to observe, ‘if we could make a couple of hundred by it to get us out of our present difficulties.’

‘Oh, that is out of the question, my poor fellow. I have deceived myself, maybe, as much as you. This may be but the result of hazard—even if it lives. The next attempt may fail. I must make a hundred experiments before I dare breathe my secret to a living soul, and count myself blessed if I live to see it verified.’

I heaved a sigh loud enough for him to hear, as he bent over the grass.

‘Patience, John, patience,’ said he calmly. ‘What if we only lay a stepping-stone for others to cross by?’

‘Why, sir,’ said I, a little irritated by so much patience, ‘we’re not likely to do that much if we stick in the mud ourselves.’

He quitted his observation of the blade of grass reluctantly, rose, and coming to me, laid his hand on my shoulder, and said :

‘What do you imply by that, John?’

‘We have tried our utmost, sir, Miss Thérèse and I, and broken down completely. We can neither make nor raise money; our resources are exhausted. Levy and Dobson will turn us out of this house on Midsummer Day, and where we are to find another roof to shelter us or bread to eat, I don’t know.’

He regarded me in silence for some moments, not at once realizing the situation. Then he said gently:

‘Are we so pressed as that, John? What is to-day?’

‘The third of June, sir.’

‘That gives me but three weeks. I can do nothing in the time,’ he said, turning his eyes despairingly upon the pot in the window. ‘Nothing!’

‘But we must do something, sir, and at once.’

He reflected for some moments, then he said :

‘Yes; something must be done at once. You have given us enough, John; you must think of yourself now. You are young, I have no fear for you. But my daughters—where are they? Fetch them if they are in the house.’

When I returned to the room with the young ladies, Lebrun was seated in a chair, his chin upon his breast, his long thin hands folded on his knees. But at our approach he rose quickly, shaking his head as if to throw off the dejection that had overpowered him.

‘My dear girls,’ said he, drawing his children to him, and speaking with more affection than he had shown for many days, ‘I find that we have to pay more dearly for our faults than we expected. Sit by my side, dears, here, and let us face the worst hand in hand, so. John tells me that he sees no way of recovering our lost position—indeed, I feel sure that you have deferred speaking to me on this subject, with the loving wish to spare me pain, until the last hope of surmounting these difficulties failed, and to be silent would be no longer kind. Is it not so?’

‘Every day we have hoped for some better things to come to-morrow; but now our case seems quite desperate,’ said Thérèse. And then she went over the many projects we had formed and the attempts we had made, all ending in failure.

Daphne added her tearful commentary, and I a useless observation here and there; and Lebrun listened to all three with grave attention, showing more sympathy with us than was to be expected of one whose views were so different from ours, whose notions upon worldly matters were so unpractical and odd. He seemed humbled by the consciousness that he was chiefly to blame for the misfortunes of his family.

‘If we could only earn a little money,’ said Thérèse, when there was nothing more to say.

‘Why, that you can do, and must, my dear girls,’ responded Lebrun. ‘Sooner or later the old tie that has bound us together must break. It is the order of Nature that children shall leave their

parents and fare for themselves. I could not expect nor hope to keep you with me always. And if this breaking-up is hard upon us, coming prematurely, yet it must be borne with resignation, like other ills. Happily you have never known luxury, so you have little to lose by this change in that respect, and your lives have not been idly spent. What you have done hitherto for love, you must now do for bread.'

'Why, what can I do, papa?' asked Daphne helplessly.

'You, Daffy dear? What you can best do, like the rest of us. You are fond of children.'

'Yes, dear; but I—I don't think I've sufficient instruction to teach them.'

'Heaven forbid you should try,' said he, smiling, as he passed his hand over her shining head. 'The market is overstocked with teachers of that kind. But you can take care of them, tend them, supply their physical wants.'

'Do you mean, papa, that Thérèse and I are to be servants?' asked Daphne, aghast.

'Certainly, dear. Are we not all servants, helping each other for our common advantage? And is not she who serves the best most worthy of respect?'

The idea of Thérèse wearing a housemaid's dress and cap, and of Daphne wheeling a perambulator in the park, to be patronized by the policeman and ogled by the passing guardsman, would have tickled my sense of humour at another time; but it horrified me now almost as much as it did poor Daphne.

Thérèse alone seemed neither shocked nor astonished by this proposition.

‘What is to become of you, dear, if we separate?’ she asked, drawing a little closer to her father.

‘I haven’t forgotten my trade, Tess; I can still clean a watch,’ said he, kissing her grave face. ‘You will see to that, John,’ he added, turning to me. ‘In finding something for yourself, you may come upon a journeyman’s place for me. We may share the expense of a lodging, you and I. You know my tastes—anything will do for me.’

‘But your laboratory, dear—your studies?’ remarked Thérèse.

Lebrun rose in silence, his eyes turning to the pot upon the window-sill, and for some moments he stood absorbed in thought, his fine head and the intellectual beauty of his features, overcast with the deep shade of philosophic resignation, reminding me of some antique marble representing heroic suffering. When he spoke he seemed rather to be reasoning with himself than addressing us.

‘A man must live for science, or—forsake science to live. He cannot serve two masters; the past has proved that. It must go—all that I have striven for and the joy of striving. Philosophy must serve to make me a decent clockmaker: that is something. What is the day, John?’ he asked abruptly, turning to me after a pause.

I told him the date again.

‘Why, that gives me yet a few days. Is it reasonable to spend them idly?’

‘Certainly not, sir,’ said I. ‘Go back to your studies, sir ; you may do something yet in the next three weeks.’

He grasped my hand as if I had given him new life.

‘Trust me,’ said he. ‘When the day comes you shall find me ready to take my place again at the bench as if I had never left it.’

After this we attempted to resume our ordinary routine of life as if no catastrophe impended, hiding our secret trouble as well as we could. It was as if someone had said to us, ‘Eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow you die.’ We ate and drank, but with a poor appetite, and our merriment was forced and unreal. Knowing that we were so soon to part, I felt for these dear friends whom I had known so long an indescribable affection, quite painful in its intensity.

Poor Daphne was the worst actor of our company ; she could hide neither her grief nor her repugnance to the lot before her. Her bright complexion faded, her little white nose became red, and her eyes were swollen and blistered with weeping.

One day a van full of children, on their way to the Crystal Palace, passed the house, singing at the top of their voices. It was pleasant to see the little waifs so happy ; but Daphne, turning away from the window, said :

‘I begin to loathe the very sight of children.’

I thought she would fall ill, and so did Thérèse, whom I discovered more than once with a neglected

book in her lap, her hands knitted behind her head, and her eyes fixed dreamily upon the distance.

Then, one day, while the girls were out, something happened which had the most extraordinary effect upon Daphne. From being utterly miserable and spiritless she became elated to the highest degree, and she had now as much difficulty to subdue her exuberant happiness as before she had to keep back her tears.

At first I conceived that Mrs. Masson had taken pity upon her nieces and come to our rescue ; but I soon perceived by their silence on the subject that this could not be. Thérèse would not have kept that secret from me ; and the cause of Daphne's exhilaration was a secret. She made that apparent by many a malicious smile at me and covert glance at Thérèse.

Sometimes these covert glances would be arrested by the pensive expression in her sister's face ; then her smile quickly faded, and gave place to a look of fear and apprehension, as quickly to be banished by a return of joy, as she flung her arms round Thérèse's neck and clung to her, rocking to and fro in a kind of ecstasy of love. Love, indeed, was life to her ; a panacea for every ill, a charm to chase away the sombre spirits of Dread, and repel even the mild figure of warning Prudence.

In the demeanour of Thérèse, too, there was a change. Certainly, she was not light-hearted like Daphne, but now and then her pale cheek flushed with a tender warmth at some whispered word of

Daphne's ; and at other times she would rouse herself from still reflection, and a flash of reckless defiance brightened her dark eyes.

These signs were unnoticed by Lebrun, whose every moment now was devoted to the science which was so soon to be forsaken ; and I did not seek an explanation, saying to myself that if it were right I should know their secret Thérèse would assuredly tell me. It was enough for me to see that sweet flush mantle on her cheek, to hear the pretty ripple of Daphne's laughter : one can enjoy the beauty and the perfume of flowers without seeking the origin of their sweetness.

However, when we were within a week of Midsummer Day, I thought it time to look at the paper for advertisements of situations that might suit me and Andrew Lebrun, and to look about for a lodging, and one morning I said to Thérèse :

'There's a nice airy room to let upstairs at the baker's in Church Street. I should like you to see if you think it would suit Mr. Lebrun. To-day is the 18th.'

Daphne lowered her face to conceal its expression, casting a sidelong look of suppressed amusement at her sister. Thérèse, after a moment's silence, lifted her eyes from the table, and replied quietly :

'We will wait a few days longer, John. Something may happen.'

And something did happen. The next morning, a little after nine, the two young ladies came down into the shop, where I was turning up some move-

ments I had bought cheap in Clerkenwell. They were both dressed to go out, quite plainly, but with a distinctive elegance not to be found in the appearance of under-bred persons.

‘We shall be back by dinner-time, John,’ said Thérèse.

I ran to open the door, observing that both sisters wore new gloves, and then I caught sight of a carriage and pair drawn up at a little distance from the house. A footman opened the door as the young ladies appeared, and I saw them step into the carriage.

Assuredly it was not Aunt Barbara’s equipage: the driver and footman looked too comfortable for her service, and the horses were the handsomest I have ever seen. The harness was all silver-plated, and the panels flashed in the sunlight as the carriage turned the corner of the street.

I had a presentiment of the truth; Thérèse was gone to be married. And I was so convinced of this that I went upstairs and put on my best things, that I might be more presentable when she returned, as she had promised, bringing her husband with her.

With this conviction in my mind, I was not surprised, when the carriage dashed up to the door a little after mid-day, to see a gentleman alight first and give his hand to Thérèse.

He was tall, well-dressed, and had a dark moustache; that was all I could distinguish as I ran to open the door (being considerably confused), but as

he nodded pleasantly to me and said, 'How do, John Grey? Glad to see you again,' I recognised in him that mysterious being—man or monster, a phantom of the imagination or a creation of Nicolas Van der Hoël and Andrew Lebrun—Mr. Percival Somerset.

CHAPTER X.

MR. SOMERSET'S GENEROSITY AND ANDREW LEBRUN'S.

'I AM married, John, and this is my husband, Mr. Somerset,' said Thérèse in a low voice that trembled a little, as I closed the door. 'You will tell papa that we are here. Shall we go upstairs, Percy?'

'By all means, chérie; I'll be with you presently—as soon as I have had it out with our friend Grey,' he replied, raising his hat as he disengaged his arm.

I observed now that he wore his natural hair. It was closely-clipped, but silvery white, presenting a startling contrast to the youthfulness of his face and figure, and the dark tint of his moustache and eyebrows. The effect, though peculiar, was not displeasing, and gave him a certain aristocratic air that harmonized with his carriage and the somewhat supercilious cast of his features.

His height and the tilt of his head made him seem to be looking down on one, and there was an air of good-humoured patronage in his glance, even in the admiration he bestowed upon his wife as his eyes followed her to the stairs.

There was never a smile upon poor Daphne's face now, and she passed the laboratory door hurriedly with a glance of terror, terrified by forebodings of her father's wrath.

'Old Abracadabra is in there, I suppose,' said Mr. Somerset when we were alone, with a jerk of his head towards the laboratory which he had reason to know so well.

'Yes, sir, Mr. Lebrun is in there,' said I. 'I will fetch him.'

He arrested me by a single deprecatory movement of his finger. And here I may remark that his movements were no longer distinguished by those theatrical gestures and that courtly grace which had struck me as an archaic oddity when I saw him before. They were rigid as his shirt collar, constrained, abrupt, in all respects resembling those of the fashionable loungers I have seen in the stalls of theatres and in Piccadilly.

'Let him stay there, John,' said he, taking a silk handkerchief from his pocket and flicking the counter with it. 'I am not particularly anxious to meet the old fossil,' he added, half seating himself on the place he had dusted and carefully replacing his handkerchief. 'We are going to have a rather bad quarter of an hour, Mr. Andrew Lebrun and I. Our last meeting did not whet my appetite for another, and the next will probably destroy any relish for further communication.'

He spoke in an undertone that could not reach his wife's ear in the room above: but I saw by his

manner that he was resolved to let her know at the first opportunity that he would brook no control or interference with his affairs on the part of her father.

I had thought him handsome as he entered the shop, and as his eyes followed his wife to the stairs with voluptuous admiration ; but I could find nothing in his face to admire now. There was cruelty in the half-closed eyes and the lines parting from the pinched nostrils—the cowardly cruelty of a weak nature, which accentuated the vulpine character given to his features by the facial angle and his receding chin.

‘My poor young mistress!’ thought I.

Mr. Somerset drew a note-book from his pocket, and opening it leisurely, he glanced round the empty shop and said :

‘The oof-bird seems to have forsaken its nook in your blooming rookery.’

His turf slang contrasted as oddly with his former phraseology as his stiff collar with the lace ruffle he then wore.

‘Well,’ he added, handing me a folded paper between his second and third fingers, ‘there’s a nest-egg that may tempt the biped to return.’

I unfolded the paper and found that it was a cheque on Grote and Grote for two thousand pounds. His generosity took my breath away, for it did not strike me till afterwards that the sacrifice was not his but Thérèse’s.

‘This is exceedingly good of you, sir,’ I gasped ; ‘but here is more than we need.’

'If it isn't enough, you know where to come for more,' he replied carelessly, rising from his seat.

'Shall I write you an I. O. U., sir?' I asked.

'Damn your I. O. U.'s! Do you think I'm a shop-keeper? Tell the old man he will find me upstairs. And,' pausing at the foot of the stairs, 'we lunch at the Metropole; if it's agreeable to you we shall be pleased to have your company.'

Had he said point-blank, 'This is the last chance I shall give you of seeing my wife,' his intention could not have been more clearly indicated.

He had scarcely left the shop when I heard the key turn in the laboratory door, and Andrew Lebrun the next moment came out quickly.

'Who's voice was that I heard?' he asked in a tone of anger.

'Mr. Somerset is upstairs, sir.'

'What does he do here? I forbade him to come to the house.'

'One moment, sir,' said I, laying my hand upon his arm as he set his foot upon the stair, and then dropping my voice I added, 'let me pray you to control your resentment. Mr. Somerset is—your son-in-law.'

'What?' he gasped, clutching at the banister as if the blow had stunned him.

'He is married to your daughter Thérèse.'

'My daughter Thérèse!' he exclaimed in a voice broken with emotion, and regarding me with supplication, as if it were in my power to revoke the truth.

'My Thérèse married to him!'

I passed my arm through his and led him away from the stairs' foot—he yielding to my guidance like a child—that Thérèse might be spared the knowledge of his grief.

‘Think, sir,’ said I in a low voice, ‘that if this is an evil, the punishment must fall most heavily on your daughter. Conceal your displeasure, your sorrow, if you can, that she may not begin this new life with remorse. Give her some chance of happiness.’

‘What chance of happiness has she, married to a gambler and a libertine, by his own confession—one who fears no God, who never loved a creature but himself?’

‘He must love your daughter, to make her his wife.’

‘What love is that which springs only from the senses? How long will it last? How soon will she be cast aside, like a broken toy, for some new plaything?’

‘Hush, sir, hush, for Heaven’s sake! She may hear you.’

‘I warned her,’ he murmured, dropping his voice in obedience to my hint.

‘Forgive her, sir. Do what you can to make her happy. Remember how useless warnings are where human passions are concerned.’

‘You are right, John Grey, you are right,’ he said thickly, a tear dropping from his quivering lid. ‘I, who have sacrificed my child’s happiness to this passion for less human things, should know that.

Had I listened to the voice of Reason, I should have saved my Thérèse from this. Lend me a handkerchief. Yes, yes, you are right,' he went on, brushing the tears from his eyes; 'for her sake I must make the best of it. Who knows,' he added, striving to speak hopefully, 'who knows but that she, with her woman's wit and tact, may make a man of him—that the charm of her soul may not awaken the better love before he tires of her face?'

We took another turn or two across the shop, he talking in this strain and I encouraging him as best I could; and then drawing himself up and pushing back the long wisps of hair that had fallen over his ears, he returned my handkerchief with another affectionate grasp of the hand, and with an assuring nod, as if to say, 'I will think only of Thérèse and her happiness,' he went upstairs.

I remained below, of course, my heart touched with pity for old Lebrun, whose submission showed how deeply he loved his daughter, how conscious he was of his own responsibility for her fate, my mind bewildered by the crowd of speculations and reflections that chased through my brain.

As I sat at the bench fingering my tools aimlessly, Daphne came on tip-toe to my side, with her finger raised to enjoin silence.

'Papa is not a bit angry,' she whispered joyfully. 'He has kissed Thérèse. If I had thought he would be like that I should have stayed in the room, but I expected him to be terrible.'

'You don't know yet how much he loves you. He

would have done anything to prevent this marriage, but he will do nothing to make Thérèse unhappy now that the step is taken and cannot be retracted.'

'I don't know why he should object to her marrying Mr. Somerset simply because he is so rich. It's a stupid, old-fashioned notion, all that about station and classes, and so on. If Thérèse has been happy with nothing at all, it's just absurd to think that she can't be happy when she gets anything in the world that she wants, isn't it?'

'I hope so,' said I, 'with all my heart.'

'Why don't you say "Yes," you stupid John, instead of saying "You hope so"' (mimicking my lugubrious tone) 'as if you had not a grain of hope in you? There! what do you think of that?' she asked, opening a long morocco-bound box and holding it before me.

On the white velvet lay a stream of diamonds that quite dazzled me with their brilliancy. They must have cost over a hundred pounds. I could only lift up my hands in admiration.

'They're mine,' she whispered in exultation. 'He gave them to me when we came out of church. But you should see Thérèse's. Oh, you can't conceive how lovely they are! *Now* do you think she is likely to be happy? It's all through dear old Aunt Barby. She wanted Thérèse to marry him months ago, but Thérèse had to be quite driven to it. That's why Aunt Barby refused to get us out of our difficulties.'

'Ah!' thought I, 'she hopes to push herself as well

into a higher circle of society by hanging on to Mrs. Somerset's skirts, and claiming her husband's gratitude. But she will find herself deceived, if I know anything at all of Mr. Somerset's character.'

'Mrs. Masson had better keep away from this house,' said I. 'Your father will forgive his daughter, but he will never forgive your aunt.'

'Oh, then, pray do not say a word about it to him, or papa will never let me go to Stamford Hill again. Are you coming to lunch with us?'

'I think not.'

'Perhaps it wouldn't be quite in your way, John. But papa has accepted the invitation; I heard him. Dear, dear old father, he'd rather go back to his laboratory I know. But he must make a beginning. He'll have to go into society when Tess comes back from the Continent to her house in Park Lane. They are to live there—in Park Lane, you know—until the end of the season; and she will have her own carriage and horses and everything she wants. And——' she broke off, and tilting the open case and her head with it to catch the flash of the gems, she exclaimed in a soft tone of rapture, 'Oh, John, aren't they lovely?'

At the same moment I heard Mr. Somerset's voice on the stairs, and I know not what grim presentiment seized me, but my heart was wrung with the paralyzing spasm I have felt in seeing a child fall under a horse's hoof. Involuntarily, rudely, I closed the lid of the box, shutting out the light that was turning the head of our poor little Daphne.

CHAPTER XI.

DAPHNE AMUSES HERSELF.

THE carriage dashed away with Thérèse and her husband, Andrew Lebrun, and Daphne, and as I caught the last glimpse of Thérèse's pale face I turned away, and entered the empty house with an indescribable sorrow, feeling that the part she had chosen to play must be tragic, and that all the splendour with which her husband might surround her in these days of satisfaction could serve only as the gorgeous opening of a scene to lend a contrast to the gloom of the inevitable catastrophe.

To put an end to these dismal forebodings, I put on my hat, shut up the house, and walked off briskly to Lombard Street, where I cashed Mr. Somerset's cheque ; then I called upon Levy and Dobson, and settled up with them ; after that I took a four-wheeled cab, and going to some honest dealers in Clerkenwell, I bought as much stock as I could pack into the vehicle.

I managed this business so expeditiously that I got back to Weaver Street and had a dozen clocks ticking away cheerfully on the wall before Lebrun and Daphne returned.

'Now,' said I to myself, 'the house won't seem so silent and deserted. It will amuse Daphne to open that parcel of fancy goods and examine the contents ; that will prevent her feeling her solitude so much.

And the look of the furnished shop, if he happens to notice it, which is doubtful, will set my master's mind at ease, and put him in heart to go on afresh with his studies. As for me, I shall have enough to do in ticketing all this stock and dressing my window to keep my mind from dwelling on other matters for a good fortnight.'

But I was wrong in my calculations, as far as they concerned Andrew Lebrun, for he had scarcely entered the shop before, glancing round at the clocks, he said to me :

'I thought we had no money to buy stock, John?'

This compelled me to tell him of Mr. Somerset's generous gift, which I did with some hesitation, knowing the sentiment of independence and pride which underlay the old man's philosophic character, and his aversion to Mr. Somerset. At another time I feel sure he would have resented my acceptance of money from his hand, but now he had humiliated himself and coerced his anger too much to take umbrage at trifles. He nodded his head twice or thrice, looking at me mournfully, and then glancing again round the shop he turned away in silence, bowing his head, and with a little movement of the hands that said, as plainly as if he had spoken his thought in so many words :

'Not for herself, but for us ! For this bagatelle my child has sold herself.'

And the next morning, finding me occupied in ticketing the goods when he came down, he took the pen from my hand and said :

‘Tell me the prices, John. I will mark the tickets and put them on.’

‘Why, sir,’ said I, ‘there’s no need to put yourself out of the way for that. Here’s no more work than I can get through in a day or so. Won’t you go to your studies as usual?’

‘I have done with them,’ he replied. ‘Having lost one daughter, the least I can do is to take care of the other.’

Thenceforth he devoted himself to Daphne, sacrificing everything for her with a gentle indulgence of her many caprices, a patient tolerance of her frivolous disposition, which was the more admirable because his own character was so different in its serious bent and steadfastness.

He would read fiction to her while she worked with her needle at embroidery, interest himself in fancy work that must have seemed to him particularly futile and useless, approving of the endless schemes she attacked, and smiling when she abandoned one unfinished thing to begin another.

And when she was tired of listening he would take her to look at the shops in the West End or St. Paul’s Churchyard, spending all the money he had in his pocket to gratify her desires. Frequently we went to the theatre; and every Sunday, when the weather allowed it, we got out into the country and spent the day in the woods, or by the sea, or at the river-side.

At first the change and variety of this new life delighted Daphne. She was conscious of her father’s

devotion, and, beside the feeling of triumph in winning him from those 'horrid analyses and things,' her heart, which was as sweet and tender and full of gentle impulse as any that ever beat in the breast of an innocent child, responded largely to the old man's love. Oh! her heart was full enough of love—too full, maybe; it was only that little head of hers which lacked something.

And so, after awhile, when the novelty and freshness of her situation wore off, she began to tire of having everything her own way, as she tired of most things; and having all that we could give her, she began to cast about for fresh desires to gratify.

It seemed to me when we went to the theatre (where we sat in the pit) that the people in the stalls, their dress and their manners, interested her as much as the performance on the stage. And one day, coming down from her room, where she had been nearly the whole afternoon, she said to me, with a long sigh:

'What is the use of diamonds if one cannot wear them?'

This indicated clearly enough the tendency of her thoughts, and her ambition was stimulated by the letters that came from Thérèse, who, for her father's peace of mind and to stifle any apprehensions on her behalf that we might feel, wrote always in a happy vein, telling of the beautiful places she visited, of grand cities and their gaities, of the people they met, and her husband's indulgence and lavish kindness.

'Oh, mustn't she be happy!' exclaimed Daphne.

‘Will you tell me now, you stupid John, that she could be as happy if she were a housemaid?’

I did not attempt to point out that if there were thorns in her bed of roses Thérèse was the last person in the world to complain of them.

One day Daphne ventured to hint at the breakfast-table that she should like to visit Aunt Barbara.

‘We haven’t seen her since Thérèse went away, and she would be so delighted to hear all about her. I can fancy her expression when she hears that Tess dined at the same table with a royal prince, and went to Longchamps with the Duke and Duchess of Haggerston. Jane could manage to get dinner if I told her how to do it.’

‘To be sure, Daffy dear,’ said Lebrun. ‘We will go on a tram; the air will do us good.’

By her subdued expression of delight I fancy that Daphne would have preferred to go alone. One can have too much of a good thing—even of papa—sometimes; and her eyes were beginning to open to the fact that she was being protected, though her father did his utmost to remove any feeling of restriction on her part or suspicion of his surveillance.

She returned in such ill-humour from this visit that I thought something unpleasant must have taken place at Stamford Hill. She was too cross to question that night; but the following morning, having quite recovered her ordinary cheerfulness, I said:

‘You found Mrs. Masson as kind as ever yesterday?’

'Oh yes. She wanted me to stay with her, but of course I couldn't, now there's only one of us, and papa and Jane and you to look after. That's the worst of it. Did I seem very horrid last night?'

'A little upset, Miss Daphne. I thought perhaps Mrs. Masson had told Mr. Lebrun of the part she had played in your sister's marriage.'

'Not a word. Poor old Aunt Barby!' she exclaimed, clapping her hands and laughing at some mirthful memory. 'She had nothing but ill to say of Percival, and prognosticated all sorts of misfortunes for Tess, which shows that she's received some awful snub. I should think Percy could be extremely horrid if he chose, and you may be sure he don't want to see Aunt Barby's scraggy horse pulling up before their house in Park Lane, or to have Uncle Masson playing ducks and drakes with his aitches at their dinner-table. There's no fear of Aunt Barby confessing to putting her finger in that pie.'

I think it was that day that Daphne first conceived the idea of amusing herself at my expense. I know she was wearied by the monotony of her life and thirsting for some new source of excitement. For no better reason than that wiser people than she get into mischief.

I remember well enough how it began. She brought a bracelet that wouldn't fasten, and asked me if I could mend it for her. I took a pair of pliers and opened the snap in a moment.

'There,' said I; 'it will fasten well enough now. What shall I charge you for the job?'

‘Why, you may put it on for payment,’ she replied archly, holding out her wrist and drawing up her cuff.

I had seen her with her sleeves tucked up to the elbow a score of times since her childhood, but, somehow, the beauty of her arm never appealed to my senses as it did at this moment. I noticed how white and smooth her skin was, like a piece of satin, and there was a dimple in the turn of her wrist. The bracelet was small and difficult to fasten, and when my fingers touched her soft, cool hand it was as if an electric current had been set up by the contact (yet I had shaken hands with her on meeting her at the breakfast-table without experiencing any unusual sensation), and this rendering my fingers still more awkward, I dropped the bracelet on the floor.

She laughed as I picked it up, and held out her wrist again, raising her cuff this time still a little higher. A sort of madness possessed me, I think, as I clasped the chain once more, but there was a method in it, for I fumbled over the business more than was necessary, letting my fingers fall with intention on her hand, to renew the strange delightful feeling that had turned my head.

When the snap was closed and I looked up, our eyes met, and in hers was a look I had never seen there before—some fire that instantly lit up all the dormant passion in my breast. She did not thank me, but turned away in silence with a blush, and sticking my glass in my eye, I asked myself what

was the matter with me. Then, not hearing her step on the stairs, I glanced over my shoulder and saw her waiting at the foot, expectant. She smiled then, and ran upstairs quickly.

Possibly it was my odd appearance, looking over my shoulder with the watchmaker's black glass in my eye, that excited a mirthful feeling—but I didn't think of that; all I knew was, she had lingered to give me that smile, that some new feeling had sprung up between us, and that I was no longer the John Grey I had been, and that I could never again regard Daphne with the same temperate affection I had hitherto felt for her.

I could think of nothing but that look in her eyes, that smile, the feel of her cool skin under my touch, all day, and when we met at the table I dared scarcely raise my eyes to look at her, fearing and hoping at the same time that I might find once more that subtle influence in her regard. What had begun by mere accident ripened quickly under mutual encouragement.

She was a born coquette, and all the arts of coquetry she employed for my subjection. It was a triumph to turn the head of such a sober, staid, slow fellow as I by a single glance, and doubtless the effect of lively passion upon such a man was as amusing to her as the dancing of a bear to children.

One night, when we were at the theatre, Daphne, sitting between me and her father, suffered her hand to slip from her lap, and it touched mine. The music and the scene had fired my imagination; all through

the evening I had felt an irresistible yearning for personal contact with the lovely girl beside me, and now, having the opportunity, I slid my fingers round hers and pressed them strenuously. She turned her head, and our eyes meeting, dwelt in each other's for two or three moments.

I never closed my eyes that night, but I dreamt all the same—dreams the more foolish because I was wide awake. Had I been a poet instead of a prosaic clockmaker, my imagination could not have taken bolder flights; and all my projects seemed realizable. In the end, I resolved to put my fate to the touch without delay, feeling not only for my own sake, but for Daphne's, that I was bound in honour to keep my passion no longer a secret from Andrew Lebrun.

'Sir,' said I the next morning, when we were alone, and I had screwed up my wavering courage to the sticking-point, 'I have fallen in love with your daughter, and I must make her my wife or go away from here.'

'I know you love her, John,' he replied, laying one hand on my shoulder and grasping my hand with the other. 'I have seen it, having nothing to do but to watch over my little Daphne. Make her your wife—it is the dearest wish of my heart.'

It was too late. If this had happened a week before I should have asked Daphne to marry me, and she, I think, from mere lassitude and craving for change, seconded, of course, by that feeling of affection she had always borne me, would have accepted me. But before I could find an oppor-

tunity of speaking to her an incident occurred that dispelled all my visions of happiness, and turned the current of her life into a new channel, never again to mingle with mine.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SHADOW DEEPENS.

It was but a telegram from Thérèse at Dover, announcing her return (a week before the expected time) from the Continent, and begging her father and Daphne to join her at the house in Park Lane that afternoon. With this visit before her Daphne naturally was not in a condition to listen to a proposal of marriage from me. She could think of nothing but what she was to wear, until her father gravely suggested that it would be as well to buy a penny-worth of buttons to sew on his shirt. Then clasping her hands, with a look of terror, she exclaimed :

‘ Papa dear, you can’t possibly go ; I never thought of that !’

‘ But I intend to go, Daffy. What is your objection ?’

‘ Why, you haven’t got a dress suit. No one in Park Lane can dine without one.’

‘ Very good, my dear ; we will come away before dinner.’

‘ Before dinner !’ exclaimed Daphne aghast, she having already packed up a ball dress for the occasion.

‘Certainly; I will do nothing willingly to offend against good taste. The first principle of every society is that its laws should be respected.’

They went away in a cab, Daphne insisting on taking a trunk with her, ‘in case’; but a little after seven Andrew Lebrun returned on foot and alone.

‘They pressed me so urgently to let Daphne stay for a few days, and it seemed to me reasonable to give way—the sisters having been separated so long and having so much to tell that could not be told before me,’ he said, as an excuse to me.

‘Why, to be sure, sir,’ said I. ‘It’s only natural that she should wish to stay; and it would have been unkind to Mrs. Somerset as well to have brought her away so soon. I hope you found your daughter quite well, sir?’

‘Yes, John; a little fatigued by the journey, but that was only to be expected.’

Nervously rubbing his long, thin hands one over the other, he repeated the phrase again and again, as if to justify his own conclusions.

‘And Mr. Somerset?’ I asked.

‘Quite well, thank you, John; but a little fatigued also. They have been to so many places, and surely nothing is more fatiguing than sightseeing.’

Still the same apologetic tone in his voice, dashed with a forced hopefulness.

‘Nothing in the world is more wearisome,’ I agreed. ‘An afternoon at the Royal Academy gives me a headache, and two days at the Crystal Palace would kill me.’

The old man nodded, though he seemed too absorbed in his own reflections to observe mine.

‘A beautiful home, John,’ he continued; ‘everything that money can buy. After all, I may have underrated the power of wealth to procure happiness. Certainly, ease and comfort and pleasure go a long way towards making one content.’

Was it only contentment that he hoped for in that Park Lane establishment? I asked myself.

He concluded the conversation by asking me to find a tailor who could make him a dress suit without delay. When the suit came home he put it on to go again to Park Lane, and I, who expected him to look awkward in a garb he had never worn before, was struck by his fine appearance. It did not detract at all from the noble character of his countenance, and certainly harmonized with the refinement of his features.

‘Well,’ thought I, ‘Mr. Somerset will not have to blush for his father-in-law.’

When he returned he was silent, and looked so dejected that I dared not question him closely about his visit. But he told me that he had never seen Daphne brighter or prettier. Thérèse, he admitted, still looked a little tired and pale.

‘She was always pale,’ I suggested.

He acquiesced, but despondently.

He went a third time, and came back still more depressed. Upon my suggesting, a few days after, that I should get a new cravat for his next visit, he said:

‘Never mind about that. I shall not want evening dress again;’ and then, turning to me after a moment’s hesitation, he continued, as if I had a right to his confidence: ‘I am not wanted there, John. Even my poor Thérèse dared not ask me to come again.’

I ventured to mention Daphne’s name, and the cloud deepened on his brow.

‘Thérèse needs her,’ he said. ‘We must not take her away just now.’

It needed no conjurer to divine that Thérèse was unhappy, but the source of her unhappiness was a mystery to me until I learnt it from Daphne. One afternoon, after about three weeks’ absence, a carriage drove up to the door, followed by a cab. Daphne was in one, her box on the other. We were astonished, for we had received no intimation of her coming; but she explained in a breathless way, as her father held her hand, that Thérèse and her husband were going to Scotland, and that she had forgotten to post a letter written two days before to tell us of her movements. But the same evening, being quite alone with me, she said:

‘John, I’ve a dreadful secret, and I don’t know whether I ought to tell papa or not; and so I think I will ask you to advise me.’

‘You may be sure of my confidence in any case.’

‘Well, John, I didn’t write any letter. I didn’t know I was going to leave Park Lane this morning. John, Mr. Somerset is—oh, my darling Tess! my poor darling sister!’ she exclaimed, covering her

face with her hands, and bursting into tears. When she had recovered from the paroxysm of grief that overcame her, she said fiercely: 'He is a villain—a brute. This morning he asked if I would go to Scotland with him.'

'And your sister?' I suggested.

'That is what I asked, and he replied with a coarse laugh, "Oh, we'll leave her behind for preference, or drop her on the road if she chooses to make herself disagreeable." He spoke of her as if she were a worn-out servant that he must keep, but might treat as he pleased—a mere thing bought for a moment to be cast off the next; and he said such things to me. He dared to——oh!' She broke off, hiding her burning face again.

'You have told me enough,' I said.

'No, no; you will think I led him to this; you have a right to think so, knowing what a little fool I am. But indeed, indeed, I am innocent! How could I think of such a thing, he being my brother? For I thought only that, and it seemed quite natural that a brother should be kind and nice. When he undeceived me I could not speak or think for wonder and terror. I ought to have thought and found it out before.'

'The scoundrel was cunning enough to hide his purpose till he believed he had prepared you for his offer. How were you to know his villainy?'

'I should have known it, for, oh, John, when I told darling Tess, she could only pity me!'

We were silent for some minutes, and then I said:

‘We can do nothing. Your father knows that Mrs. Somerset is unhappy. It is better that he should know no more until your sister thinks it right to tell him.’

‘Will she ever tell—my darling, darling Tess!’ she exclaimed; then she burst into tears, and hearing her father enter the shop, ran upstairs to her room, that he might not discover her grief and learn its cause.

No; knowing the character of Thérèse, her pride, her fortitude, and the love she bore her father, I said to myself, ‘She will never betray her sufferings or permit others to share her burden of responsibilities, though she suffer martyrdom at the hands of the man she has married.’

The affliction of my heart must have been only too clearly depicted in my face, for Lebrun, coming to me, said:

‘My poor Grey, has Daphne refused you?’

‘No,’ said I; ‘she is unwell, and has gone to her room. I have not asked her to be my wife.’

‘Ah! she is upset by late excitement: I could see that. We must give her time to return to her normal condition. I am too impatient, maybe; but what father could be indifferent when his child’s welfare, her lifelong happiness, is in the balance?’

I saw then that he had gone out purposely to give me a chance of addressing Daphne; and he gave me other opportunities, but they served only to crush my fainting hopes.

One evening, in speaking to me of Thérèse, now in Scotland with her husband, she exclaimed:

'I shall never marry. All men are wretches. I don't mean men like papa and you, John; but marrying men.'

It is quite possible that the pleasures of the past three or four weeks had effaced the memory of her brief flirtation with me; and I had not the courage to recall it to her recollection. Indeed, when I looked at my long, lugubrious, sallow face in the glass, I saw what a fool I had been, and wondered how I could ever have thought seriously of her being my wife—she having such a butterfly nature, I being so dull and heavy.

How could I, bending best part of the day over my bench, satisfy her natural desire for movement and variety? What sort of happiness could she find in life as the wife of a working clockmaker? The incongruity of such a match was made more evident (now that my eyes were opened) by the shade of melancholy that deepened on her young face as time went on.

Doubtless, with the knowledge of Thérèse's misfortune on her mind, she grieved secretly for her unhappy sister; but this was not the chief cause of her depression, for with time this trouble would have weighed less rather than more upon her mind. No; it was the dull monotony of life in Weaver Street that burdened her spirit. She was pining for the natural joys of youth, for the unrestricted enjoyments that Pleasure beckoned her to taste, pining like a caged bird for sunlight and space and liberty.

'She can never marry me,' I said to Andrew

Lebrun, when he sounded me again upon the subject. 'Nature has not intended her to be the wife of a simple working man.'

'Who shall she marry, if not a working man?' he asked fiercely. 'A man of pleasure? I tell you, John Grey,' he pursued, with still further intensity of feeling, 'I would sooner see my child dead at my feet than married to such a man as that.'

He had already begun to read between the lines of Thérèse's letters.

CHAPTER XIII.

DAPHNE LEAVES US.

DAY by day Daphne grew paler, thinner, more languid. She sang no more; at times she burst into tears, and could give no reason for it save that she felt 'so tired.' She, who had been so self-willed and careless, became pathetically docile and thoughtful—yielding at once to her father's wish, seeking to keep the rooms neat and tidy, and putting down her household expenditure in a book as Thérèse used to do.

Andrew Lebrun, who watched her with the keen eye of a practised observer, perceived the growing change in her with the terror of one who marks the progressive symptoms of a fatal disease in his best beloved. And at every fresh attempt to win her back to her former self he recognised his inability to

combat with the secret enemy that was sapping the base of her existence. One evening she begged to be left at home when he proposed that we should go to a theatre. She was 'so tired!' and but a few months before nothing in the world could have made her willingly forego a play.

His own secret misgivings with regard to Thérèse led Lebrun to attribute Daphne's depression to a more certain knowledge of her unhappiness, and thus his trouble for one daughter was augmented by the trouble of the other. At length he decided to take Daphne to a physician, despite his perfect conviction that she suffered from no organic derangement—just as a man at the last extremity takes any nostrum that a quack may offer, on the mere chance that hazard may succeed where science fails.

Just at this juncture Mrs. Masson called upon us. She had not the good taste or the feeling (which is, perhaps, the same thing) to disguise her alarm at the change she found in her niece.

'Why, my poor child, you're a perfect ruin,' she exclaimed. 'You're as thin as a hurdle and as pale as a ghost. I see what it is, Andrew,' she pursued, turning upon Lebrun. 'You are hurrying the poor child into a decline. Mark my words, she will be in her grave before another year's past.'

Daphne covered her face with her hands and began to cry silently. The idea of early death is pathetic to all, but most to the young.

Andrew Lebrun winced for his child, but showed no resentment to the brutal attack upon himself,

knowing that the woman who made it was actuated by some rude kind of feeling for Daphne.

'If she don't do that,' pursued Mrs. Masson relentlessly, 'she'll run away, as Thérèse did; and I shouldn't blame her for it, even if she made as bad a choice of a husband. *That* was entirely your fault. A lovely, amiable, sensible girl like Thérèse would never have married in that clandestine manner, without even taking her female relatives into her confidence, unless home had been made unbearable and her future a terror.'

'You mistake her motives,' said Lebrun; 'she married for the sake of others rather than herself.'

'Well, she'd have been less to blame if she had thought only of herself. However, I'm not angry with her, poor girl; I pity her too much.'

'What do you know about *her*?' Lebrun asked, alarmed now for Thérèse.

'Oh, no more than all the world knows—no more than you might know, if you read the papers like other men. Mr. Somerset has taken a theatre, and everyone knows what men who are not professionals sometimes do that for. It isn't to please his wife, you may be sure. It will end as usual in a divorce, and you'll have Tess on your hands again, and serve you very well right, Andrew.'

Lebrun passed his hand over his forehead, clotting a wisp of silvery hair to his sweating temple.

'Don't cry, Daphne, my dear,' continued Mrs. Masson; 'what's done cannot be undone. We've

got to think how you may be saved from such a disaster.'

'Yes, that's it,' gasped Lebrun eagerly. 'You wouldn't say such cruel things without a kinder purpose. I know that I have done wrong—that I am helpless.'

'Helpless! of course you are. Whoever knew a man who wasn't when a family's in trouble? You're no more fit, any one of you, to bring up children than a monkey to hatch out a setting of eggs. What do you know about girls and their wants and ways? How is that poor child to live prisoned up in this horrid place—I can smell the cabbages in Spitalfields market from here—with no companions of her own age and sex? Your friends the Davises have gone to their country house for the summer, I suppose. Yes; I thought so. No one to speak to but you and John Grey. What can you talk about but chemicals and clockwork? How can that interest a young girl? Books! what sort, I wonder—the "instructive and amusing" kind, I suppose. What's this? Thackeray. I expected as much—a man's book. Where's a fashion paper, or anything that appeals to *our* tastes? What can she do all day, poor child, but sit and brood about Thérèse, and what might have been? Ah, little you care so long as you can go into your laboratory and study rubbish!'

'Papa has not gone there even for an hour since Tess left,' said Daphne.

'So much the worse for you, I'll be bound. There's a great deal too much papa. A nice thing for a

young girl never to move a step without being watched and corrected and set right by an old man, who regards human beings as mere combinations of acids and salts, and their passions and feelings as the gas they throw off. You want movement and variety and youthful society—and *no papa* for a few weeks. I'll be bound that would bring back your lost colour and brightness, my poor love.'

'Do you offer these advantages?' asked Lebrun.

'Of course I do; for who else has the poor child to befriend her now that Tess is, as you may say, quite lost? I am going to Lowestoft on Saturday, and I will take you with me, my poor dear unhappy child, if your papa can trust you out of his sight for a few weeks.'

'We shall see a physician to-morrow,' said Lebrun, 'and if he supports but one word of your argument Daphne shall go, and I will be grateful to you for taking her away from me.'

Dr. Clarke supported not only one but every argument that Mrs. Masson had put forward. He even employed a phrase that she had used:

'Miss Lebrun is suffering from too much papa,' said he, when the old man had stated the circumstances of the case with the scrupulous exactitude of a scientific man; and then he prescribed the very remedy offered by Aunt Barbara.

'It is only too true, John,' said the old man, in telling me of this consultation, 'I am not a fit man to have the care of my daughter.'

And so it was settled that Daphne should go away with Mrs. Masson. The loving girl protested against this, begging her father himself to take her to the seaside, and promising to find there all the distractions that Aunt Barbara could procure for her ; but Andrew Lebrun was not one to buy physic and throw it away. He insisted on carrying out Dr. Clarke's advice to the letter.

Daphne left us in tears, for I believe that she had sunk into so low a condition as to have lost the appetite for pleasure.

I remember how eagerly we seized the first letter from Lowestoft, how we weighed each word and construed the hidden significance of each sentence. There was gloom in those early letters, but little by little, as the light creeps up before the rising sun, a brighter tone appeared—brighter and brighter—until we could read her letters with smiles, and not a doubt of their spontaneous gaiety.

At first her letters compared ill with those from Thérèse ; but now by contrast we could detect the forced cheerfulness with which Thérèse wrote. And this shifted our anxiety to the elder sister. She never came to see us. Probably her husband had forbidden her to come ; but it seemed to me odd that she never appointed a meeting with her father in the Park or elsewhere, she writing now from Park Lane.

‘ She will give her husband no cause for reproach,’ said Lebrun ; and that he might not create dissension he purposely abstained from proposing a meeting.

But often and often he dressed himself with scrupulous care, and was out from morning until late in the evening. I knew well enough that he had been in the West End with the hope of seeing his daughter; but, as he came home dispirited and silent, I felt that it was useless to question him. Had he but seen his dear Tess only from a distance, he would have come home joyful and told me of it. I knew that.

Mrs. Masson had the grace to invite him to Lowestoft at the end of three weeks—to enjoy her triumph, I believe, rather than to give pleasure to the old man and Daphne.

‘She is quite herself again, quite herself, John,’ he said, on his return. ‘She cried, of course, when we parted; but she smiled too.’

And then he told me that Mrs. Masson, pointing out the wonderful effect of this change upon Daphne, had proposed that the father should give her up entirely—Mrs. Masson undertaking to care for her like a mother.

‘And I think I shall agree to it, John,’ he said, in conclusion. ‘I couldn’t think of it then: it seems so hard to lose both children after so long, and being so happy together; but if it is for her advantage!—and then she will come and see us sometimes—perhaps for a whole day once a week.’

‘Yes, yes, sir,’ said I; but that word seemed to choke me. To think that we should see Daphne, who had been the joy of the house, our very life, only now and then, and but for a flying visit—that

she would gradually go farther and farther from us, forgetting us for strangers. Oh, it was more than I could bear to dwell on!

‘But what is my pain,’ thought I, ‘compared with my poor old master’s?’

To distract his thought I asked him to renew his studies, now that he might do so without harm to his children; but he was reluctant to act upon my advice, though he seemed to see that it was a rational means of overcoming a useless grief.

However, after some hesitation, he said one day that there was one thing he would like to prove, and he went into the laboratory again for the first time since Thérèse’s wedding-day.

When he came out he had a pigeon in his hand; its feathers were wet and clung together, and it seemed half-dead. Andrew Lebrun sat by the window holding the bird in the sunlight, and administering something from a wooden spatula; after which it got strength and began to plume itself, and suddenly it fluttered its wings and flew out of the open window.

Lebrun, watching its flight as it wheeled round over the housetops, exclaimed:

‘There can be no doubt now. I have won the secret.’ And then he added bitterly, as he sank into a chair, ‘Is it worth the price?’

CHAPTER XIV.

ANDREW LEBRUN PREPARES FOR THE WORST.

REGULARLY once a week a letter came from Thérèse. Always she wrote in the same uncomplaining, almost cheerful tone, but in the latter ones I was struck by two peculiarities: she no longer used paper with the blazoned crest her husband had assumed, and she made no comment upon Daphne's visit to Lowestoft.

And then Daphne in a letter to her father said:

'I can't tell why I have had no letter from Tess. I have written three to her and she has sent me no reply.'

We could find no explanation of this: it seemed impossible that Thérèse could overlook the letters of one so dear to her as Daphne, or fail to take interest in her welfare, no matter how her time was occupied by the pleasures of society. Then came a week in which the old man received no letter at all from her. At the end of the week he sent a telegram to Park Lane; there was no reply. At this, his patience giving way before a more terrible apprehension than entered my imagination, he cried in a frenzy of desperation:

'I *must* see Thérèse. She is my daughter. No husband, be he what he may, has the right to keep us for ever asunder.'

And the following day, Sunday, he left Weaver Street early in the morning, and did not return till

after midnight. Mrs. Somerset was not at home when he called ; he watched the house all day, and that there might be no chance of error, called again at half-past eleven. The footman again said that she was not at home, and would give him no other information. He told me this on Monday morning, and then asked if I could let him have some money.

‘Yes, sir,’ said I ; ‘business has been looking up lately, and our expenses have been lighter. How much would you like ?’

‘I don’t know. How much does it cost to bribe a West-end servant ?’

‘Why, sir, that depends on what you want of the servant.’

‘I want to see my daughter—that’s all,’ he replied in a quavering voice, stretching forth his hands as if in supplication.

‘A servant can easily manage that without any great sacrifice. If I give you fifty pounds——’

‘Let me have it !’ he cried eagerly. ‘If that isn’t enough we must find more.’

Andrew Lebrun took the money and went again to Park Lane.* It was about eleven in the morning when he rang the visitors’ bell. The same footman who had answered him before came to the door, and recognising him, said, before Lebrun had time to open his lips :

‘Oh, Mrs. Somerset ain’t at home.’

* What happened here and elsewhere subsequently, not known to me at the time, I transcribe freely from the written statement made by Andrew Lebrun before his trial.—*J. G.*

‘When will she be home?’ asked Lebrun.

‘Don’t know.’

‘Where is she, if she is not here?’

‘Can’t tell.’

‘One moment,’ said Lebrun, as the man was about to shut the door in his face. ‘You can tell me if there are any letters waiting here for your mistress. I am prepared to pay you for a civil answer;’ and he put his hand in his pocket.

‘Oh, that’s another matter. There are a lot of letters here for Mrs. Somerset, and I am instructed to give them to any party she may send for them. Now, if you’re that party——’

‘Let me have them!’ said Lebrun, putting some sovereigns in the fellow’s ready hand.

The man fetched a bundle of unopened letters. At a glance Lebrun recognised his own handwriting on one, Daphne’s on another. Then opening the bundle, he saw others in the same hands mingled with many from unknown friends and acquaintances—the accumulation, as he found upon closer examination, of nearly five weeks.

This confirmed Lebrun’s suspicion. Thérèse had left her husband, and, to conceal her misfortunes from her father, had written as if she were still in her home.

But the blow, though anticipated, stunned Lebrun.

‘Are you quite satisfied now, sir?’ asked the man.

‘You don’t know where I can find your mistress?’

‘No more than Adam. Ain’t seen her for over a month.’

‘I must see your master,’ said Lebrun, collecting his scattered senses.

‘Oh, no, you mustn’t. In the first place, he ain’t come down yet: and secondly, we’ve got the strictest orders not to let you cross the doorstep. Can’t stay here any longer, sir—there’s other servants about.’

‘Wait! If you let me speak to your master you shall have all this,’ and he took out a handful of gold and showed it.

‘Shove it away, shove it away!’ said the man, dropping his voice, with a glance over his shoulder. ‘Meet me at the Half Moon tap in Piccadilly to-night at eight, and I’ll see if it can’t be managed.’

Lebrun passed the day in wandering about the West End, looking, like a madman, for his daughter, now halting to scrutinize the throng that passed, now hastening to overtake some distant figure that took some fancied resemblance to Thérèse. He was in the bar of the Half Moon when the footman, in plain clothes, entered, and saluted him with a nod of recognition. They went down a by-street together, and there the man, after cautiously feeling his ground and making sure of his reward, said:

‘Look here; there’s no chance of you getting at the governor at home. It’s ten to one he don’t come in before the morning, and if he finds you in the house he’ll pretty quick have you put out by his man Thompson, or get you run in by a policeman. Now, if you want to see him sharp, take this tip from me; go to the Momus—you know the new theatre

in Shaftesbury Avenue?—and find him there. You're bound to find him any time during the show, because he left word that any wires coming in were to be sent to him there. You go straight in by the stage-door and down the passage to the stage. You'll find the governor's room on the right, with his card on the door. Don't say anything to anybody, but if the stage-door keeper, or the stage-manager, or anyone stops you, just show him this card, which we all has, and you will be passed on, and no questions asked.'

The card he produced and gave to Lebrun bore a printed direction, 'Pass bearer,' with the signature of Percival Somerset below.

Lebrun emptied his pocket, and hurried away to Shaftesbury Avenue, found the Momus stage-door, and passed the keeper, who was putting letters in a rack, unchallenged. At the end of the passage he perceived a door marked 'Private,' with Mr. Somerset's card above it. He opened the door and walked in. There was a large writing-table with piles of paper in disorder upon it, some champagne-bottles and glasses upon one corner, from which the litter of correspondence and printed matter had been swept pell-mell upon the floor.

The room was empty, but as Lebrun stood looking round a voice from an inner office, where a secretary sat, called out :

'What d'ye want?'

'Mr. Somerset,' replied Lebrun.

'You'll find him up in the flies.'

Lebrun ascended the first flight of stairs he came to, and found himself presently in a labyrinth of scenery and stage machinery, with rows of flaring gas-jets over an open space in front of him.

'Who are you looking for?' asked a limelight man, arranging his apparatus hard by, as Lebrun groped his way amongst the deep shadows.

'Mr. Somerset.'

'He's gone up on the gridiron with some swells.'

Taking the direction indicated by a jerk of the man's hand, Lebrun found another staircase and went up. On the landing above he found a knot of gentlemen in evening dress sticking close to the handrail and holding on tight, for just beyond was a black chasm behind the back cloth, the depth of the proscenium plus the scene dock in the cellar.

'Go down to my room, you Johnnies. I'll turn out this gas and be down presently,' said someone from above.

Lebrun recognised that voice, and lifting his eyes, saw Somerset standing on the top of a narrow step-ladder, fenced on one side by a handrail, that bridged the chasm and abutted on the gridiron—an open grating thrown across the stage and the highest footing place in the house.

The gentlemen responded and hastened to descend from their nerve-shaking position. Lebrun passed them and mounted the narrow ladder to the gridiron. The chorus was trooping on to the stage below from the wings. From that height the men and women looked no larger than mice. The sky-borders, with

the lines of gas-jets behind them, seemed but midway between him and the boards. A slip of the foot would be sure death; but Lebrun's foot was as firm as though no peril beset him.

'What the deuce do you want, sir?' demanded Somerset, as Lebrun rose before him, barring his descent as he returned from turning off the gas he had lit to show his friends the curious network of joists and rafters forming the roof-tree of the theatre.

'My daughter,' replied Lebrun.

'You don't expect to find her here, do you? Get out of my way!'

'Not before you have told me what has become of my daughter.'

'You insolent old vagabond. Do you know that I might pitch you down there?' pointing to the open space below.

'You might throw me, or I you. We might both go, but not I alone.'

Somerset hesitated. At that moment the finale of the comic opera began—a volume of sound from chorus and orchestra rising that would drown and carry away his cry for help. He found it advisable to temporize—distasteful as it was to a man whose wealth shaped most circumstances to his will.

'How should I know where your daughter is?' he asked. 'She chose to leave me a month ago, and if she has not returned to you it's her fault, not mine. If you think you have any claim upon me, apply to my solicitors—my secretary will give you their address.'

‘I have come here to deal with you, not to know the address of your solicitors.’

‘Well, name your price, and you shall have it.’

‘I demand my daughter, not your money.’

‘How can I give you what I have not? I tell you, I haven’t heard a word of your daughter since she went away—and I don’t want to.’

‘But you shall want to,’ said Lebrun. ‘You talked of throwing me down there, and I heard you out. Now listen to me. I gave you life, and you took away my daughter; you shall give me back my daughter, or I will take away that life I gave you. This is not a prayer, for prayers are powerless to touch your soulless understanding, but a threat, and not an idle one. You shall search for my child, whom you have cast off like a faithless thing, and you shall find her, and that within a week, or, by Heaven! I will find you, wherever you be, and make you answer for her.’

‘She may be dead for aught I know—or care.’

‘If she be dead, then you shall die. You shall die if she is not found alive within a week. I swear it!’

* * * * *

I knew nothing of this interview, as I have said, until some time after. When he came home my poor master could not speak a word, seeming utterly broken down. He laid the unopened letters before me in silence, and, leaving me to discover their significance, he went to his room. As I passed the door noiselessly to go to my own chamber I heard him sobbing like a child.

‘You know what has happened,’ he said, when we met the next morning.

‘Mrs. Somerset has left her husband?’ I suggested.

‘A month ago,’ he said, bowing his head. ‘Heaven knows what has become of her. We must seek her, John—you in one direction, I in another. Either she is sick or dead.’

I suggested that the silence of the last week might be attributed to the miscarriage of a letter, but he shook his head, and said :

‘All my hope lies in the hospitals. If I do not find her there I shall know that she has taken the last alternative of unhappy women.’

‘The hospitals!’ I exclaimed. ‘Why should she be taken there? She has jewels, money——’

‘Not a farthing,’ he interrupted; ‘not a gem. She would take nothing that came from him.’

We shut up the house and began our search that day, I going to the police and making inquiries, he to the hospitals. At night we met, and, looking each other in the eyes, read the fruitless result of our search.

After our silent supper Andrew Lebrun took a lamp and went down into his laboratory, while I, setting my elbows on the table, sat brooding over our misfortunes with my face in my hands.

Suddenly I was terrified by hearing a report like a gun-shot in the laboratory. With a horrible fear at my heart I ran down and pushed open the door, which my master had only half closed.

To my great relief I found Andrew Lebrun stand-

ing in the middle of the laboratory, calmly inspecting something in his hand by the light of the adjacent lamp.

‘I beg your pardon, sir,’ I stammered. ‘I—I heard a noise, and feared an—an accident had happened.’

‘No, John, nothing has happened,’ he replied. ‘I am only learning to use this little instrument;’ and with that he raised the revolver in his hand and coolly fired another shot at a spot he had marked upon the wall.

CHAPTER XV.

MR. SOMERSET OFFERS REPARATION.

I WOKE at daybreak the next morning, hearing a movement in the room below, where Andrew Lebrun slept. I slipped on my clothes hurriedly, and went down just as my poor old master was taking his hat from the peg.

‘It’s a fine morning for a walk, sir,’ said I, assuming a cheerful tone. ‘What time would you like breakfast?’

‘You need not wait for me, John,’ he replied. ‘I shall not be in before nightfall.’

His heavy gait as he descended the stairs told as plainly as these words the hopeless spirit in which he renewed the search for his lost daughter. Outside in the street he hesitated for a moment, looking to the right and to the left, as if quite undetermined in

which direction to go, and when he moved on it was with a plodding step, his shoulders bent, his hands folded behind him, and the most woe-begone expression that I ever saw upon a man's face.

For my own part, I could think of no means to help him in his search. I had stated the case to the police authorities at Westminster, and they had promised to do all that lay in their power to find Thérèse, and (significantly enough) before I left the office they examined a register to see if my description of the missing lady tallied with any of the 'unknown' dead found since the date of her last letter.

I opened the shop and took my seat at the bench, saying to myself:

'It won't do to neglect business altogether. No matter what happens, one must eat and drink. Idleness can serve no one, and who knows but that a bright idea may come to me while I am cleaning a watch?'

About mid-day a hansom rattled up to the door, and a middle-aged gentleman, very neatly dressed and with closely-clipped iron-gray whiskers and a long pointed nose, stepped out briskly and entered the shop, carrying a professional black bag in his hand.

'I wish to see Mr. Andrew Lebrun,' said he.

'He's not at home, sir, and I fear he will not be in before nightfall.'

'You cannot tell me where I may find him? No? Very awkward. My name is Long, and I am Mr. Percival Somerset's solicitor.'

I bowed stiffly, and he, looking me up and down as he caressed the tip of his nose with his thumb and forefinger, seemed to take my length in a moment.

‘You are Mr. Grey, I presume?’ he said, and, as I bowed again, continued: ‘I shall acquaint you with my business, Mr. Grey. firstly, because there is no time to be lost; secondly, because I know you are a faithful and staunch friend of the family; and thirdly, because I perceive you are a practical business man, and, if I may venture to say so, a man of the world.’

I went to the shop-door and closed it for greater privacy, feeling mightily pleased with myself and Mr. Long—not because he esteemed me a business man and a true friend of the family, for I knew that was true, but in being considered a man of the world, which was altogether a new thing to me. I suppose it is our natural ambition to be something better than we are which makes nearly all men subject to flattery in having qualities attributed to them which they do not possess.

‘As a real friend you must have the practical interest of the family at heart,’ he continued, ‘and as a man of the world you must regard this unfortunate affair from a dispassionate and reasonable point of view.’

‘Well, sir,’ said I, placing a chair for Mr. Long and taking my place on the other side of the counter, ‘what can I do for you?’

‘Tell me, first of all, have you obtained any tidings of the missing lady, Mrs. Somerset?’

‘None, sir. I have consulted the police authorities at Westminster, Mr. Lebrun has visited the hospitals, and we have both failed to find any trace of her. My poor old master has gone out this morning without knowing which way to turn his steps, and I——’

‘Like a sensible man, have stayed at home. An investigation of this kind requires means that you cannot possibly command. Those means will be provided by my client, and rightly so, for I do not pretend to dispute that he is the party chiefly responsible for this unfortunate occurrence.’

‘Chiefly!’ I exclaimed in indignation; ‘he is wholly responsible. What charge can he bring against his wife to justify himself in the slightest degree?’

‘None whatever. He generously accepts the entire responsibility. But can you and I, Mr. Grey, as men of the world, hold Mrs. Somerset blameless? She was not a thoughtless child. She married Mr. Somerset with her eyes open, knowing that he was a man of pleasure, who denies himself no gratification that his boundless fortune can procure. She must have known this, for on those grounds Mr. Andrew Lebrun refused Mr. Somerset’s addresses, and forbade this marriage. Miss Lebrun, you are aware, married Mr. Somerset surreptitiously, and in defiance of her father’s wish. Now, with these facts before you, can you, I ask, as a sensible man of the world, absolve her from all responsibility for the consequences of her act?’

‘She has done no wrong to her husband.’

‘Pardon me, Mr. Grey, she has committed the fault which you would make by incurring a debt which you could not discharge. Let me state the case without reserve. Miss Lebrun married Mr. Somerset for money. You know the price he paid. In return for that she owed him the affection and obedience of an ordinary wife, plus a certain amount of tolerance which every woman accedes to a husband of his position. You must be aware that the idle class and the working class are governed by a very different code of morality—that men and women in the upper class of society are allowed a certain license which would never be tolerated in the respectable middle-class. This fact was clearly known to Mr. Lebrun, or he would not have forbidden Mr. Somerset to visit his house or opposed his daughter’s marriage. He knew that his daughter, with her illusions and class prejudices, ought not to marry a man of Mr. Somerset’s character. But, in spite of his objections, she did marry Mr. Somerset, and with the inevitable result.’

I could not find a word to say in reply to Mr. Long’s argument. Remembering the look of tragic resignation in Thérèse’s face before the marriage, it seemed to me not improbable that she had foreseen these consequences, and sacrificed herself to save her father and Daphne, with no hope for herself but the faint prospect of reclaiming her husband from a life of dissipation and profligacy.

‘I am not here to defend Mr. Somerset’s failings, which to me, the father of a family, seem culpable

indeed ; but I wish to put my client's case in a clear, practical light, that you may lend him all the assistance in your power to execute his present laudable purpose. He wishes to make the utmost reparation for the injury he has done this unhappy young lady.'

'It must be more than a month since Mrs. Somerset was compelled to leave her husband. He has taken time to think of this reparation.'

'He has not wasted a single day, Mr. Grey. Until the night before last he was under the firm conviction that Mrs. Somerset had returned to her old home here. That was a natural conclusion on his part. When he learnt that she was not here and could not be found he sent for me, and, with every appearance of sincere anxiety, told me I must spare no expense in finding her and in satisfying her just claim upon him. And let me tell you, Mr. Grey,' he pursued, dropping his voice, 'that if that claim should run into five figures, it will be met without protest.'

'What are ten or twenty thousand to a man of his possessions?' I asked. 'No more than the coppers we might give to an organ-grinder to go into the next street and leave us in peace.'

'I name no price, Mr. Grey. If you demand a hundred thousand it will be paid to avoid scandal.'

'Heaven knows to what pitiable need that unhappy lady may be reduced,' said I. 'But this I will answer for ; if she were dying for help she would not take it from her husband's hand.'

‘But there are other members of the family who suffer and have to be considered. It might satisfy some craving of retribution on their part, you know, if——’

‘If Mr. Somerset offered all he possesses Andrew Lebrun would not take it—no, not one penny of it.’

‘But with your assistance, Mr. Grey,’ urged Mr. Long insinuatingly. ‘We count upon your influence. I believe you have helped a little in this way already.’

I took the hint, remembering the cheque I had received from Mr. Somerset. Attributing my silence to mercenary calculation, doubtless, Mr. Long continued, in a somewhat firmer tone:

‘But there must be no scandal, mind. If any—er—accident should have happened to Mrs. Somerset, making it impossible to restore her to her family——’

‘You mean if she is dead?’ I said, despite the dread that made my flesh creep.

‘Well, yes. In that case we are prepared to pay any reasonable sum as a solatium to the family, but on condition that Mr. Lebrun shall be restrained from committing any violence upon my client from a spirit of vengeance.’

He stopped there, for, ill-disposed as I was to merriment, the idea of my poor broken-down old master committing an act of personal violence forced me to laugh.

‘I see nothing ridiculous in that suggestion,’ said Mr. Long, regarding me with astonishment.

‘You would, sir, if you knew Andrew Lebrun as I know him. He is as incapable of inflicting personal injury upon anyone as he is of—of accepting a bribe. Vengeance! why, his whole life is a protest against a sentiment that he regards as iniquitous. He is a philosopher.’

‘Hum! Philosophers,’ observed Mr. Long, drawing his finger and thumb down his long nose reflectively—‘philosophers are not always philosophic.’

‘I have never known him to injure a living creature. He holds violence in abhorrence. His creed is one of forgiveness and charity. He maintains that we are creatures of circumstance, and that punishment is injustice, that justice has no right to avenge, and that the only law which commands obedience is that which restrains a man from evil-doing.’

Mr. Long raised his eyebrows with a look of contemptuous amusement in his face.

‘The question is,’ said he, ‘does Mr. Lebrun’s practice agree with his remarkable precepts?’

‘In every particular. I have never heard him utter a reproach, or stir a hand to punish an iniquity. When he was robbed of all he had he refused to pursue the thief; when his daughter disobeyed him and married Mr. Somerset, his first endeavour was to repair the evil done—to conciliate Mr. Somerset, rather than to alienate him by a demonstration of anger.’

‘Then what he said to my client the other night you regard as a mere threat and nothing more?’

‘I know nothing about that,’ said I. ‘He has

scarcely opened his lips since he told me that his daughter was gone. He is quite broken down. Ah! if you saw him as he went out this morning you would say that he couldn't lift his hand even to ward off a blow.'

Mr. Long drew a deep breath, and nodded his head several times in evident satisfaction.

'This alters the complexion of the affair very much indeed,' said he. 'Of course it will make no difference in our attitude. All that money and human ingenuity can do to discover Mrs. Somerset will be done, and if she is not found within the week it will be because she is beyond human reach. In that case——' he glanced at me inquiringly.

'You will have done your utmost on Mr. Somerset's behalf to repair the evil, and Andrew Lebrun will be the first to acknowledge it.'

'Well, now,' said he briskly, as he dived into his bag and brought out a sheet of foolscap and a pencil, 'let us waste no more time, but get to business. I must have a list of every relative, friend, and acquaintance of the missing lady.'

I hesitated, thinking of Daphne, who had not yet been apprised of her sister's misfortune.

'You need be under no apprehension,' said Mr. Long, divining the cause of my reluctance. 'The inquiries will be made by practised hands, charged in the interest of my client to avoid any suspicion falling on their purpose. Come, Mr. Grey, you must see that this is solely to our common advantage. Now, as a man of the world——'

Under this last fillip I proceeded to help him make an exhaustive list, and I also furnished him with an envelope that had contained one of Thérèse's later letters. With these he went away, promising to wire me the moment he learnt anything concerning Mrs. Somerset.

It was not until after his departure, when I was pondering the incidents of this interview, and wondering what he meant by Andrew Lebrun's 'mere threat,' that I recalled to mind my fright of the night before, and my astonishment in seeing my old master practising with a revolver.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DATE UPON THE DOOR.

I HAD put up the shutters when Andrew Lebrun returned. He sank down on the shop chair as if he could go no further, and spreading his long arms on the counter, looked up at me in pathetic silence. There was no need to ask him if he had found any trace of Thérèse ; failure and utter hopelessness were written in his face. But something in mine brought a gleam of animation into his sunken eyes, and he said quickly :

‘What is it, John?’

I gave him a full account of my interview with Mr. Long, suppressing only his offer of a pecuniary recompense, but dwelling forcibly on his assurance that no effort should be spared to find Thérèse. But

he lapsed into apathy after he had heard the object of the solicitor's visit, and my most hopeful conjectures failed to arouse a responsive feeling.

'Yes, if money could bring my child back, she would be here within the week,' he said, when I had come to an end.

That was his only commentary, but it betrayed plainly enough his settled conviction that Thérèse was beyond recall.

'I am losing account of time,' he said presently. 'When did I see that man?'

'The day before yesterday, sir. November the fourth.'

He took up a piece of French chalk that lay on my bench, and, going to the door of the laboratory, he wrote some figures upon it, putting a cross against the last, thus :

4
5
6
7
8
9
10 X

He smudged out the two first figures that night ; and on the next, when he came in from his hopeless search, he wiped out the third. These diminishing numbers had a strange fascination for me. I could not pass the door without glancing at them. That cross against the 10 began to wear a terrible signifi-

cance, for on the tenth the week expired in which Mr. Long had undertaken to find Thérèse. What the nature of that threat was at which Mr. Long had hinted I then knew not, but this I could answer for—whatever Andrew Lebrun had promised he would fulfil. But, looking at my old master, so feeble now that a child might have struck him to the ground, the idea of his attempting to chastise a vigorous young man like Mr. Somerset seemed almost as ridiculous as it was tragic. Yet, broken down as he seemed physically, his purpose was clearly unshaken. Not once did he overlook the dates upon the door, and on Monday there remained but the last two.

I trembled the next night when he came in and rubbed out another figure, leaving none but the last, with that fatal cross against it. Happily, that evening a letter had come from Daphne, still at Lowestoft with Mrs. Masson. I put it in her father's hand when he sat down at the table I had laid for him. Glancing at him as I made pretence of beginning supper, I saw that he was greatly moved by it. A tear ran down his hollow cheek and fell upon the paper trembling in his hand. Now and again he had to brush his eyes to decipher the words. It touched my heart to see these signs of emotion. I was glad to see them, nevertheless.

‘It will do him good,’ thought I, ‘to give vent to his pent-up sorrows. Anything is better than that apathy—that dreadful stillness of a heart benumbed by affliction.’

‘Read it, John,’ he said, handing me the letter when he had read it through.

Daphne wrote in exuberant spirits. Her letter was full of quaint conceits and playful pleasantry, with an undercurrent of tender affection that redeemed it from mere frivolity. It would have cheered us at another time; we should have laughed with her, and felt the happier. It saddened us now, this note of gaiety breaking the awful silence of our great trouble. It sent our thoughts back to the past. I could hear her singing at the top of her voice, stopping only to laugh at the sober remonstrance of Thérèse, now gone from us for ever; and the thought that came to me must have come to her father.

‘That is all past. We shall hear the sound of her light-hearted voice no more.’

For she was still ignorant of her sister’s fate. In a postscript she wrote:

‘I am becoming quite anxious about Tess. I have written three letters, and received no answer, and you have failed to send me her weekly letter. I say to myself, “No news is good news, but good news is better still.” Do write soon, dear, for you, too, are a little remiss in this, and John Grey seems to have quite forgotten me.’

‘She must know sooner or later,’ said the old man, when I gave back the letter.

‘And the sooner the better, sir, as it seems to me,’ I replied.

He was silent for some moments, and then, his

lips quivering with the agitation of his mind, he said in a tone of yearning :

‘ I must see her again, John—my little Daffy.’

‘ Why not, sir ?’ I asked, jumping eagerly at the suggestion as my thoughts turned in apprehension to the date upon the door. ‘ You may soften the blow. It will be better for her and for you too. You can do nothing here that the practised agents employed by Mr. Long will leave undone. If anything happens I can send you a telegram on the instant.’

‘ I scarcely dare to, John,’ he said, rising and walking across the room as if compelled by some irresistible influence.

I rose also, and taking his arm, said :

‘ She has good feeling, and greater fortitude than you think. She will bear this bravely, if only to spare you pain. It is at such times as these that a woman’s real nature shows itself. Remember how thoughtful and considerate she has shown herself when occasion required—for instance, when Miss Thérèse was laid up last spring. She went about the house as silent as a mouse, and from being a careless child became suddenly a helpful little woman.’

‘ Yes, John, yes ; I remember,’ pressing my hand gratefully. ‘ Oh, she has a heart of gold, my little Daffy. It isn’t that I fear.’

‘ Why, then, sir, there’s nothing else that I can see to prevent your going down to Lowestoft to-morrow, and surely, if anything can clear away your sorrow for the misfortunes of one daughter it is the welfare

and happiness of the one that is left to you. Miss Daphne is herself again now—we can see that by her letters—and there is no longer any reason for your separation. The change of scene and the sea air was what she wanted, and that she may still have, and your society as well, for business was never better, and you can well afford to spend a few pounds.’

In this way I argued with him, not very wisely, to be sure, but to the best of my ability; and he listened as if he would be guided by me, not knowing how to guide himself. It was as though we had changed places, and he was the simple man, I the philosopher. Yet, though he yielded to my persuasions so far as to promise to go to Lowestoft the next day, there was still a reserve in his manner which I could not fathom.

However, I was well content with my achievement, and when he left me the next morning, saying, ‘I may be back to-night, John,’ I was secretly convinced that he would not return so soon as that by a long way.

‘No, no,’ thought I, ‘Daphne has too much real love for her father to let the poor old fellow come back here and suffer in solitude.’

I was not greatly surprised to see Mr. Long in the afternoon. He stepped out of the hansom and bustled into the shop with a customary business-like alacrity, and, having shaken hands with me in the most cordial manner, he said, seating himself by the counter:

‘Well, Mr. Grey, have you any news to give me?’

‘None, sir; the week has passed and no letter has come. You have discovered nothing?’

‘Not a single trace. The keenest men in the profession have been employed, with the prospect of gaining an exceedingly large reward. No practical means have been neglected, and we are completely baffled. Unfortunately, you see, weeks elapsed between Mrs. Somerset’s departure and the beginning of this search, and that, of course, makes the scent very difficult to take up. Undoubtedly, in quitting her husband she abandoned his name—that is evident from her giving you no address through which you might communicate with her. Then, from the obvious desire to conceal her misfortune from her family, she would avoid visiting any of her former friends and acquaintances. All this makes our task extremely difficult. Still, we do not despair.’

‘I see no grounds for hope.’

‘She may have gone abroad.’

‘That would not account for her silence. She would have told us all her trouble rather than let us fear still worse.’

‘Between you and me, Mr. Grey, my theory is this: Mrs. Somerset took apartments somewhere in the West End under a false name, and there she has fallen ill. Now, without being fatal, that illness might incapacitate her for writing letters.’

‘How could she take apartments?’ I asked. ‘She had no private means, and I feel perfectly sure that

she would take nothing from Park Lane that was not strictly her own.'

'As a matter of fact, she did not take even that, for she left behind every article of dress and ornament given her by her husband. She went away in the dress she wore at her marriage. Even her wedding-ring was left with the jewels on her table.'

'Then how could she take apartments at the West End?'

'Well, she may have had a friend of whom we know nothing.'

He glanced at me significantly as he spoke, but I could not at once grasp his meaning. When I did, Mr. Long thought it advisable to change the subject, seeing, doubtless, in my face the horror inspired by his suggestion.

'Mr. Lebrun is not at home, I suppose?' said he.

'No; he has gone to Lowestoft,' I answered absently, wondering whether the old man had ever suspected the thing at which Mr. Long darkly hinted. Surely some such conjecture could not have escaped him as he wandered about the West End seeking his child amongst the crowds there.

'Do I understand you that Mr. Lebrun is at Lowestoft?' repeated the solicitor, for, absorbed in terrible reflections, I had not replied to his question.

'Yes; I persuaded him to go to his second daughter, Miss Daphne, there.'

'Mr. Grey, this service shall not be overlooked,' said Mr. Long impressively.

I explained to him that it was not my influence alone, but that a letter from Daphne had seemed to open his heart to tender sentiment.

‘I believe he will stay there for some time,’ I said in conclusion.

‘We will hope so. At any rate, I will wire to the agent who is watching there and learn if Mr. Lebrun has arrived.’

‘I shall be glad to hear of his safe arrival if you get news,’ said I, as he rose to go.

A little after ten a messenger brought me a letter from Mr. Long.

‘Mr. Lebrun is still at Lowestoft. Wire just received,’ he wrote.

Looking at the time-table, I found that the last train for London left Lowestoft at 8.15. This gave me a great feeling of relief, and going to the laboratory door, I wiped out the date with the cross against it.

‘There is no need of that now,’ said I to myself.

The following evening just after ten a cab drove up to the door, and, to my intense surprise, Daphne stepped out. She ran into the shop, her eyes swollen with crying, and, in a voice choked with emotion, cried :

‘Oh, John, where is papa?’

CHAPTER XVII.

DAPHNE RETURNS.

‘Is he upstairs?’ asked the poor girl, before I had time to reply to her first question.

‘No, Miss Daphne, he is at Lowestoft.’

‘At Lowestoft!’ she exclaimed, checking herself on the way to the stairs. ‘Why, I have just come from there, and Aunt Barbara told me that he went away yesterday afternoon.’

‘I am positively informed that he was still at Lowestoft last night—after the last train for London had left.’

‘Oh, now I understand. I see it all. He came when I was out, and Aunt Barbara said cruel things to him, and persuaded him to go away. But he wanted to see me, and so he waited and watched, as he used to watch in the park to see darling Tess go by. My dear, dear father! To think that he should feel he had lost both his children, and had nothing more to live for!’

She covered her face with her hands and sobbed convulsively; then, suddenly recovering energy, she started up from the chair in which she had sunk, and cried in a tone of distraction:

‘I must go back and find him.’

‘Stay, my dear Miss Daphne. Listen one moment. It isn’t likely that your father, after seeing you, would stay there when he had resolved to come

away. That would be quite contrary to his character. He must have returned to London this morning, and is now looking for your sister. It has been so ever since we heard the bad news—he has gone out in the early morning and come home late at night.'

She looked in my face with pathetic helplessness in her expression, and then, this reference to Thérèse opening a fresh source of grief, her courage gave way again, and she burst once more into tears.

I fastened the shop door, and persuaded her to come upstairs, and there I made her a cup of tea and induced her to remove her hat and mantle and wait patiently for her father's return. Outside a thick fog was settling down upon the town; the sounds in the street reached one's ears as if they came through cotton-wool; you could see the fog in the room even. I stirred the fire to clear the air, turned up the lamp to its full height to give a more cheerful light, and then I swept up the hearth and drew the big arm-chair in front.

'Papa, papa!' moaned Daphne, drawing aside the blind to look out into the thick night, through which the gas lamps shone feebly with a dull coppery light.

'Come and sit down here, Miss Daphne,' said I, shifting the big chair so as to get the most cheery view. 'I know you have come to comfort your father, and to do that you must be calm and brave.'

'Yes, John, yes,' she replied eagerly, taking my hand and pressing it between her moist palms; 'I am going to be so good. I won't give way as I did

before. I'll never be wicked and selfish and stupid again.'

I protested that she had ever been affectionate and good, but she shook her head.

'I have been a mean, selfish little wretch—thinking of myself when every feeling should have been devoted to Tess and papa, fretting like a child because I couldn't get what I wanted, giving way when I ought to have been firm. You don't know the real cause, John, but I mean to tell papa all; then he will know that I am sincere now, and will be better in future. Oh, he shall see how strong I can be. I won't cry, John—not after this little one—and tomorrow I will begin again housekeeping, but not whining and pining as I did before.'

'You do not intend to return to Lowestoft?'

'I will never willingly see Aunt Barbara again,' she replied, growing quite white with anger. 'Oh, she is wicked, wicked, wicked!'

Then, from speaking with angry emphasis, her tone changed with characteristic abruptness to gentle entreaty, as she asked me what she ought to do to be quite good.

'I have to learn first what wrong you have done,' I said.

'Oh, I have been living only for myself—selfishly indifferent to others. I have been happy every day, happier than ever I was in my life. The days were all too short, full as they were with delight. I could only think how beautiful the world was. And yet I knew that Tess was in trouble before I went away,

that papa was alone and grieving for her. What have I done to make them happier? I couldn't even spare the moments to write all that I felt—only a few silly unconsidered words now and then. I did feel for them, but such a little, so seldom! If my heart ached now and then, and my conscience pricked me, I would cheat myself into the belief that their letters to me meant no more than they said, though I could see that both were hiding their troubles. And all that I might enjoy my life without care. I silenced my fears by making myself believe what I only hoped. I thought of no one's happiness but my own, and believed it could go on for ever. Isn't that what is called a Fool's Paradise?

I forget what reply I made. It is immaterial. And she pursued :

‘Why, even yesterday I was out all day long with—with a friend, John, and when I came home at night my only regret was that the day was gone; and when I fell asleep I had the happiest dream you can imagine. It was not till this morning that I heard from Aunt Barbara that papa had come down to see me and tell me of this awful trouble.’

She was silent after this for some moments, and then, her grief giving place to anger, she exclaimed :

‘She is heartless—Aunt Barbara—she cannot have one kind feeling in her nature. When she had heard of this terrible loss, instead of trying to relieve papa's mind, she prognosticated a horrible thing, and said she had foreseen it from the first, and that papa

alone was to blame in neglecting us for his studies. If that had been true it would have been a cruel thing to say, for it makes one's misfortunes none the less hard to bear because they are brought about by one's own fault. But it was not true. Tess would never have married Mr. Somerset if she had not been encouraged by Aunt Barbara, who contrived that Mr. Somerset should meet us when we went to her house. She wanted him to marry her, thinking that he would repay her, and when he did not she became his enemy, and the enemy of darling Tess. If I had not wilfully blinded myself I should have seen that before to-day. But I trusted her because my happiness depended upon being there—away from papa. Oh, I am wicked, too! And then, John, I told her in confidence why I left Park Lane—told her that Mr. Somerset had made that proposal to me. I ought to be whipped for it. She told papa this. She dared to tell him that if she had not taken me away from here Mr. Somerset would have found means to destroy me as he has destroyed Tess.'

'Great Heaven!' I exclaimed, thunderstruck by the woman's barbarity. 'What purpose could she have in this monstrous suggestion?'

'To prevent papa bringing me back here. She pretends it was for my welfare that she broke her promise to secrecy. It was not that. I will tell papa the truth——'

'Surely your father would not believe anything so ill of you as this suggestion implies?'

‘I do not know. Surely I have justified him in thinking me capable of any wickedness.’

I could say nothing. A chill ran through me as I thought of the possible effect upon Andrew Lebrun of this communication. The date upon the door returned to my memory, and the hints at personal violence dropped by Mr. Long. With the loss of his beloved daughter in his mind, the dishonourable proposals made by her husband to Daphne, and the suggestion that this man, with his boundless fortune, would attempt to compass the destruction of the last child left to him, some signal act of violence on the part of the outraged and broken-hearted father was only too possible.

‘And yet, for all that,’ continued Daphne, after looking wistfully into the fire for some minutes, ‘I can’t quite comprehend papa. He agreed to resign me altogether—that Aunt Barbara should adopt me—that I should come back here no more. I wouldn’t believe it when Aunt Barbara told me. It seemed so unlike my father to give me up like that—as if there were no hope of my ever becoming stronger and better, as if he had lost all patience with my follies, as if he had almost ceased to love me—he who has been so loving and gentle and patient with me always. To give me up without asking whether it would break my heart or not never to come back to him here. It’s that which is so hard to realize. Can you understand it, John?’

‘Why, Miss Daphne, he must have foreseen that you would never consent to a separation which would

certainly be more hard for him than for you to bear. And then we may not know all the arguments Mrs. Masson employed to carry her point. You may be sure that she said more than she has confessed to, harsh and cruel as the accusations were which she admits having made. She must have convinced your father that all your sister's misfortunes were due to his neglect, his ignorance of the world, his inability to understand the wants of his daughters. She must have led him to believe that without the mother's care which she could bestow the same fate would be yours which has befallen your sister. Under that persuasion, could he do otherwise than agree to her proposal ?'

'She said that the proposal came from papa.'

'With all respect to your aunt, Miss Daphne, I can't believe it.'

'I won't believe it,' she cried with emphasis. 'Ah ! he shall hear what I have to say, and when he knows the part Aunt Barbara played in dear Tess's marriage, he will never let me go back to her. And he shall see that I can be strong and good.'

Then, rising quickly, she went to the old sideboard, and opening a drawer, brought out a heap of fancy work and laid it on the table—the work she had begun and abandoned in old times, a kind of monument to her caprice and inconstancy.

'There, John, I am going to finish everything I have ever begun. Darling Tess told me I should one day, when I grew a little wiser.'

She was laying out an unfinished slipper in wool-

work as she spoke. I looked on, deeply touched by the naïve simplicity of her resolution. But this reference to her lost sister, or maybe some memory awakened by the sight of the wool-work under her hand, overcame her courage, and, suddenly covering her face with her hands, she burst into tears again.

‘Come, come, Miss Daphne,’ said I, ‘you will be stronger to carry out your resolution after a good night’s sleep.’

‘Yes, yes ; I will go up soon, so that I may look quite brave when I meet papa to-morrow morning. But not just yet—a little five minutes more. Tell me what you think about dear Tess.’

‘We shall find her again before long, I have no doubt,’ said I.

‘Oh, yes, yes, yes ! Aunt Barbara suggested the most horrible things ; but we know Tess too well to believe that any circumstances could make her cowardly or wicked. That is not in her nature. And after all it seems as if we must follow our natural instincts, whether they are for good or evil—unless we are as wise and philosophic as papa, if anyone could be like him.’

We talked about Thérèse for a full hour, each supporting the other in the most hopeful view of her case, until we were both fully persuaded that before long we should hear from her again. And then, when we had said the same thing again three or four times, and the subject was exhausted, Daphne still pleaded for five minutes more, when I observed that it was striking ten.

‘I haven’t heard a word about yourself, John,’ said she pleadingly. ‘Tell me all about the business; and where’s Jane?’

I told her that our little servant had gone home to see her mother for a week, but would probably return on Saturday.

‘You will help me in the house till then, won’t you?’ she asked. ‘I mean to turn out everything. And I’ve learnt how to make rissoles; you shall have some to-morrow. Now tell me if you have found out any new escapements, John.’

The artful little maid knew my weak point, and, blinded a little by my vanity, I fell into the trap laid for further conversation, and attempted to describe an idea I had formed for synchronizing timepieces by a ball of mercury, in place of the ordinary means.

She listened, looking in the fire and nodding her head now and then, but I could see that her thoughts had wandered to a different subject. What it was I could not tell then (though I know now), but I could see that it made her happy, and with that perception I was quite content to talk on. The glow from the fire fell upon her face and gave it colour, and the look in her pensive eyes was tender and keen. I thought I had never seen her looking so beautiful. The pretty turn of her features was unchanged, but there was something added to the expression of her face that rendered her different. She was no longer a child, but a woman, and she loved. I read that in her face. But her love was not the playful, mischievous spirit with which she had upset my reason

for a few brief days: it was a real passion, that flowed like the life-blood through every fibre of her being.

It was past twelve when she at length rose and bade me 'Good-night.' When she left me I sat staring into the fire for some time in deep dejection. But coming to my senses presently, and feeling ashamed of myself, I started up, saying to myself once more that I was a fool to think Daphne could ever really love such a man as I was, and that I ought to feel nothing but satisfaction in knowing that she had found a better man whom she could love with her whole soul.

Still, I could not go to bed with those feelings in my heart, and so I went down to my bench, lit the gas, and tried to renew my interest in the business of *my* life. Scarcely had I got out my tools when the key turned in the door and Andrew Lebrun came in. The rank fog seemed to cling to him as he stood in the light.

'Give me a pen and paper, John,' he said quickly. 'I have something to write, and there is no time to spare. The police may be here at any moment. I have killed that man!'

CHAPTER XVIII.

CLOSING IN.

THIS is what had happened, as I have since gathered from Lebrun's statement and the evidence at his trial:

Andrew Lebrun arrived at the theatre that night just after the close of the performance. The fog was very dense. The narrow side street was lined with carriages. People were streaming out of the gallery exit. A cluster of men waiting for professional friends about the stage entrance choked the circulation, and the confusion was heightened by men forcing their way through the outflowing crowd and calling the names of persons at the front entrance waiting for their vehicles. The stage entrance was blocked by a group of choristers, demanding letters from the doorkeeper, and others pushing their way out. It was difficult to enter the theatre against such obstruction, but at length, following close upon the heels of a thick-set carpenter, who had business upon the stage, Andrew Lebrun got into the passage. Observing someone pass in, the commissionaire pushed the clamouring crowd of girls aside to see who it was, having been warned to let no one enter without a special order. He recognised the carpenter in his white shirt-sleeves, but failed to see the old man, the fog being thick in the passage. Half-way down the passage Andrew Lebrun was stopped by Mr. Somerset's page, stationed there as a second precaution.

'Where are you going, sir?' he asked.

'To see Mr. Somerset.'

'You can't go in without a card, sir.'

'Here it is,' said Lebrun, presenting the card he had obtained the week before from Somerset's footman.

‘All right, sir; you’ll find him in his room.’

Lebrun pushed on through the crowd of laughing men and women coming from the dressing-rooms.

Somerset’s door was half open. A woman stood there with her hand on the door-handle. Another behind her stood on tiptoe to exchange some light banter over her friend’s shoulder with someone within. Lebrun stood by, and waited until they pulled the door to with a laugh and went their way. Then he approached, turned the handle, entered the room, and closed the door behind him.

There was no one in the outer room at that moment, but someone was whistling in the adjoining office. Lebrun crossed, and on the threshold of the inner office met Somerset face to face. He wore a light coat over his evening suit; he had a crush-hat in his hand and a cigarette between his lips. He was not wanting in the impudence which, amongst a certain class of men, passes for ‘good form.’ Opening his hat with a ‘click,’ he set it carefully on his head as he asked coolly:

‘What the deuce do you do here, sir?’

‘You know what I am here for. In one word answer me. Have you found my daughter? Yes or no?’

Somerset, without removing the cigarette from his lips, grasped the back of a heavy chair that stood between them; and thus prepared to defend himself against personal attack on the part of the old man, he replied, with cynical contempt:

‘Well, since you desire me to be concise—No. But——’

Before he could add another word Andrew Lebrun had drawn the revolver from his pocket, raised it level with his son-in-law's breast, and pulled the trigger. Somerset opened his lips to cry, the blood welled up from his throat, he clutched the chair convulsively for an instant, and then dropped to the ground, dead.

Some girls were passing the outer door. Hearing the report, one stopped and cried :

‘What's that?’

‘Have you never heard “the boy” pop before, silly little fool?’ asked her companion.

‘Then they went on laughing, and one broke out with a snatch from a music-hall song :

‘Won't you stop, stop, stop,
For a drop, drop, drop,
When the boy goes pop?’

And the rest joined in ‘pop, pop, pop!’

The catching chorus was taken up by their friends lingering at the doorkeeper's office. Lebrun heard them as he passed out into the street, and I can fancy that the sounds pursued him as he plodded homewards, ringing in his ears, not as the senseless rubbish that it was, but as a grotesquely horrible dirge to the man who lay dead in the theatre.

After demanding writing materials, Andrew Lebrun sank down on the shop chair with a deep sigh of ex-

haustion, and sat there with his hands clasped upon his knee, and his head bent in an attitude of deep meditation. Without a word I proceeded to get paper, pen, and ink from the drawer under the counter and set them near him—obeying my master's orders from habitude, but quite mechanically, for every thought was engrossed in the terrible event briefly disclosed in those five words—‘I have killed that man.’

Rousing himself at the snap of the inkpot as I opened it, he took up a pen, and, turning his melancholy eyes to me, said :

‘To-morrow you must realize all that you can upon what is mine here and send it to my daughter Daphne.’ He paused, and repeated with a trembling voice, ‘My daughter Daphne, with this letter I am about to write.’

He bent forward to begin that last letter, but before his quivering fingers had traced a word it slipped from his hold, and he started up with a look of alarm.

‘What’s that?’ he gasped, his ear catching the sound of a foot upon the stairs.

Strange as it seems to me now, I had forgotten Daphne’s presence in the house, in the complete bewilderment of my senses by the terrible position in which my old master stood.

‘My child!’ he cried, as Daphne, who had slipped on a dressing-gown, hearing her father’s voice below, now ran towards him from the stairs with an inarticulate cry of mingled joy and reproach. ‘My

dear little Daffy!’ he added tenderly, folding her in his arms.

‘I have been listening with the door open for you to come,’ said she. ‘I couldn’t go to sleep without seeing you, dear. I have come home to stay with you, father—to tell you all that is in my heart, all that made me pining and wretched before I went away. Come upstairs, dear. John and I have been sitting by the fire in the sitting-room. There I can tell you why you must never let me go back to Aunt Barbara.’

He yielded to her guidance like one in a dream, and they went upstairs together, she clinging to the old man’s arm and smoothing her cheek against his shoulder with a little murmur of love.

For some time I stood where they had left me, incapable of action, like one whose senses are paralyzed by the imminence of a fearful catastrophe. Andrew Lebrun had said that the police might come to arrest him at any moment. If that were indeed the case, his only chance of escape lay in immediate flight. But, seemingly oblivious of his peril, he had yielded at once to Daphne’s desire, and she now, all unconsciously, was making escape impossible.

‘Should he be taken,’ I said to myself, ‘what is to become of her, if, as she says, there are reasons why she should never return to Mrs. Masson?’

At that moment the sound of a heavy step coming down the street stopped my breath and made my hair stand on end. Were the police come for him? In another moment they might knock at the door.

What could I answer when they asked for my master? How could I lie to them without betraying the truth by my bloodless face and faltering voice? As the step drew nearer desperation restored my presence of mind to some degree, and I hastily turned out the gas, that the light and my presence in the shop at that hour might not be an evidence to Lebrun's return. Then, with the cunning of a malefactor put to his last resource, I determined to creep up to my room on the top floor, that when the summons was made I could answer from my bedroom window, as if I had just been roused from a sound sleep. That would explain any peculiarity in my manner, and at that distance it would be impossible to see the twitching of my face. It would give us time, at any rate.

But, despite the necessity of acting at once upon this idea, I could not stir from the spot. The sound of that approaching step fascinated me, and I listened to it, stopping my breath, digging my nails into the palms of my hands in terror.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE LAST ALTERNATIVE.

THE footsteps passed the door and went onward; then I breathed again. For the moment Lebrun was safe, but the peril existed still, and I felt that I must warn him of the risk he ran by delaying his flight. I went upstairs. The door of the sitting-

room was open. Before the dying embers of the fire Andrew Lebrun sat in the big armchair. Daphne was seated on a footstool at his feet, her hands clasped upon his knee, looking earnestly upwards into his face as he bent over her with one hand upon her neck, and the other upon her head. They were both perfectly silent. There was a certain sanctity in their attitude which forbade me to intrude. This might be the last moment they were to spend in loving union. Yet, with that feverish apprehension in my mind, I dared not leave him there unwarned; and so I lingered at the door, not knowing what to do.

‘Speak, dear, speak!’ Daphne said imploringly.

‘I must think, first, Daffy,’ he replied, still holding her head and looking with ineffable compassion into her soft eyes.

I ventured to tap lightly at the door. He turned his eyes slowly, and, after regarding me vacantly for a moment, he seemed to awake from his reverie, and, with a sign of comprehension, came to me when I beckoned him.

‘Have they come for me, John?’ he asked in a low voice.

‘Not yet. But I thought it right, sir, to remind you that no time must be lost if you are to escape.’

‘Escape!’ he repeated, in a tone of surprise. ‘I never thought of that.’

I can quite believe that no thought of evading the consequences of his act had ever crossed his mind. He had agreed to the adoption of Daphne by Mrs.

Masson in the conviction that he must be forcibly separated from her by the killing of Somerset. But now that he had learnt from his daughter why she should not be trusted in the hands of that thoughtless and unprincipled woman, it was clear that this idea of escaping the retribution of the law struck him as the most hopeful means of saving Daphne from the perilous position in which she would be placed by being thrown friendless upon the world.

‘Do you think it may be done, John?’ he asked eagerly, leading me away from the open door.

‘The fog is in your favour. If it holds out you may very well escape observation in the market, where men are hanging about all night. By an early train you can start to cross the Channel, and on the Continent you may stay in tolerable safety till Miss Daphne joins you.’

‘If I were younger, quicker of foot and wit, more cunning, it might be done. But the chances are a hundred to one against me. And if I be taken, as sooner or later I may, what is to become of my child?’

‘Should you be caught but a dozen yards from the house, sir, her sufferings will be no greater—nay, they will be less than if you stay here to be arrested in her presence.’

‘That depends, that depends,’ he murmured, with a significance which I was unable then to comprehend, seeing no alternative but that I suggested. ‘Still, as you say, if this fog holds out,’ he pursued, as if balancing two hazards in his mind to find which was the weightier.

At that moment there was a sharp ring at the street-door bell, making me start as if I had received an electric shock.

‘That settles the question,’ said Lebrun calmly; ‘and for the better, perhaps.’ Then, with a sudden access of excitement, and clutching my arm quickly: ‘But they must not come in yet. I must have time. They must be kept out of the house for an hour, at least.’

‘I’ll manage that, sir,’ I replied hastily; and, releasing my arm from his grip, I bolted upstairs to my room, tearing off my coat, waistcoat, and necktie as I went.

As the bell rang a second time I threw up my window, and leaning out, I called aloud:

‘Who’s there?’

I could not see through the dense fog, but a voice from below replied:

‘We want to see Mr. Andrew Lebrun.’

‘He’s not here. Ain’t seen master for two days. What do you want of him?’

There was an indistinct murmur of voices, but no reply was given to my question, so after a pause I called out again:

‘Have you come from his daughter?’

I waited some minutes for a response, and, obtaining none, I slammed down the window as though furious at being fooled. The next moment I kicked off my shoes and ran down noiselessly to the shop. Glancing into the sitting-room as I passed the open door I saw my old master holding Daphne in his

arms, and talking earnestly to her in a low persuasive tone, and she, standing now, was listening with an expression of consternation upon her white, up-turned face.

As I stood at the foot of the stairs, straining my ear to catch the sounds from without, I distinctly heard a murmur of voices and a smothered laugh. Then there was a brushing noise, as if someone leaning against the door were changing his position, and the sound of a heavy footstep, such as had first alarmed me, coming down the street.

‘Hulloa, what are you doing here, eh?’ asked a loud voice, which I recognised as that of the night policeman whose beat included Weaver Street.

‘All right, P.C. 54,873,’ answered a voice in an undertone.

‘And P.C. 6,704,’ added another. ‘Ain’t seen the boss of this shop knocking about to-night, have you—Andrew Lebrun?’

‘Ain’t seen him two or three days. Queer lot here. Anything up?’

‘Case of murder, that’s all. Move on, old pal. We’re waiting for him, and don’t want to frighten the game.’

The whispered conversation that followed, almost inaudible to me, ended in the policeman continuing his beat, and another movement against the door as the others settled themselves into the corners of the recess offered by the doorway.

Lebrun was waiting for me on the landing at the top of the stairs. I told him what I had heard, and

then suggested that we should see if there were any means of escape by escalading the garden wall and finding an exit into Brick Lane from the adjoining timber-yard.

‘It is impossible,’ he replied. ‘I have made up my mind. When you open the shop to-morrow morning I shall be ready to give myself up.’

I did not attempt to alter his decision, for I knew how immovable he was when once he had formed a resolution; besides which I saw the impracticability of my own proposal. It required the agility of a practised athlete and the cunning of a burglar to overcome the difficulties of such an undertaking.

The old man took my arm and led me into the sitting-room, where Daphne was now sitting by the table with her face buried in her hands.

‘Here is John Grey, my child,’ said Lebrun, still holding my arm, as he laid the other hand upon Daphne’s shoulder. ‘The best friend we have ever had; the only man in the world, the only friend, whom I can trust. And here is my child, John, whom I know you love, whom you alone can save from the peril that besets her. I have told her what has happened and what must follow before long.’

‘Father, father!’ cried the poor girl in agony, dropping her arms upon the table and her face upon them.

‘I entreat you, my darling child, to yield to my wish—the last that I may ever impose upon you. I ask you, John, to make my Daphne your wife.’

‘No, no!’ sobbed Daphne. ‘He doesn’t know that I love another.’

‘That is not love you feel for the man you tell me of, but a passion of the senses, which must pass away like other passions that overthrow our reason for a space. What has this David Leigh done to command the respect and esteem upon which unending love can alone be founded? You say he is generous, amiable, handsome; there was a time when you gave the same light praise to the man who has destroyed Thérèse. You tell me that you met him at a race meeting, and that then he was the friend of Somerset. Are these facts in his favour? Did he help you manfully in your struggle to overcome this passion?—you did struggle bravely and well, my loved little one. No; when the first occasion came he renewed his attack, with no more regard to the protest of your conscience, with no more consideration for your youth and weak defence, than a wolf for its prey under the savage instincts of its brutal nature. What can you say to shake my dread of this man, my horror of leaving you to his mercy?’

‘Oh, I can say nothing but that I love him,’ moaned Daphne.

With his hand resting upon her shoulder, Andrew Lebrun looked down in silence upon the little head, quivering from moment to moment with the convulsive agitation of her mind under the double blow struck at her heart, and then, turning slowly to me with a look of fixed determination on his face that

seemed strangely out of keeping with the pity that had shaken his voice but a few minutes before, he bade me speak to her, and went from the room.

I drew near the young lady and spoke as well as I could, but with no hope, for how could I expect to win her when her father's powerful influence had failed? I felt that she must love this Mr. David Leigh with more than common passion to resist the entreaty of Andrew Lebrun at a moment when these words were probably the last she would hear from his lips. And her resistance was the more extraordinary because by nature she was so yielding and responsive. I was glad she did not raise her head to look at me, for my appearance, standing there in my shirt-sleeves, was incongruous enough with a proposal of marriage. I could only tell her how I had loved her all my life, and how I would endeavour with all my heart and soul to make her life happy in the future.

'You cannot dislike me, Miss Daphne,' I said in conclusion. 'You have never uttered an unkind word to me except in thoughtlessness, and then 'twas atoned for by a smile before a resentful feeling could kindle in my heart.'

'Dislike you!' she said, lifting her head. 'Why, I could have loved you had there been no one else—indeed, I love you now as a sister might love a brother. Ah!' she exclaimed, as an alternative flashed upon her mind, 'why should you not keep me as your sister? I will do nothing that you forbid me to do, I will be obedient and good in all

ways, I will conceal nothing from you. You shall rule my life, and I will yield to every wish of yours except that one. You cannot wish me to be your wife loving that other one ; it is too horrible to think of, isn't it ? You cannot love me less than you have, and loving me so much you will be glad to have me with you as a sister, just as I shall be glad to have you for my constant friend, having no one else in the world.'

She broke down once more under the weight of her coming desolation.

'If it may be so, I will be your brother always,' I said, to comfort her.

Truly I spoke in all sincerity, and yet in my heart I felt that the relationship we proposed was impracticable—impossible to maintain when the present trouble was past, and we came back with time to our normal condition.

Turning my head, I found that Andrew Lebrun was in the room. He stood by the table looking at his grief-stricken child with an impassive face. No gleam of hope, no sign of wavering resolution, moved his inflexible countenance. He had heard Daphne's suggestion, and seen its futility. He had paid too dearly for the neglect of his daughters to trust his last child to the mercy of accident.

'Daffy dear,' he said, calling her as if from a sleep.

At the sound of his voice she sprang up, and throwing herself in his arms, told him of the project she had formed, of her willingness never again to see

David Leigh, and her resolve to be guided by me in everything if she might be suffered to live merely as my sister, and he listened without uttering a word.

‘But why should we talk of my happiness?’ she cried, choking down her grief. ‘It is your dear life we have to think of;’ and laying her cheek in the hollow of his shoulder, she caught up his hand and pressed it again and again to her lips.

I noticed that his hand was closed, and that he smiled as she pressed it to her lips. His other hand was about her waist, and he tightened his grasp upon her, drawing her closer to his breast.

Daphne was silent now, yet her lips still rested on his closed hand. Then her hands dropped from his arm and fell inert by her side. Her lips slipped from his hand, her head falling forward, and to my horror I saw that she was sinking, insensible, from his arm. He, too, perceiving that, flung back the hand that was against her cheek, and unclosing it, let a small bottle fly against the fender, breaking the awful silence with a sharp crack.

He caught both arms about her body, but his strength was not sufficient to sustain her, and she slid slowly to the ground, her head rolling round upon her shoulder. Her lips were colourless and parted, her features rigid as in a waxen mask, and her open eyes were shrouded with a lustreless film.

‘Great Heaven!’ I cried, starting back in horror. ‘She is dead!’ and looking up aghast at Andrew Lebrun, ‘You have killed your daughter!’

CHAPTER XX.

WHAT WE DID WITH DAPHNE'S BODY.

'IF I have killed her, what then?' asked Lebrun calmly. 'Better to die by my hand than by her own, my poor little Daffy. Better to pass away like this than to seek death in desperation, with remorse, perhaps shame, in her young soul.'

As he spoke, kneeling by her side, he tenderly put back the hair from her cold brow.

The horror of this deed, and the shock upon my brain and heart in seeing the sweet girl lying there dead who but a few minutes before had bidden me be her brother, were more than I could bear. A sickness fell upon me, the things in the room swam up and down before my eyes, my legs gave way under me, and staggering forward, I dropped upon a chair. I sat there helpless, staring idiotically through a kind of haze at the dead girl, with the sweat dropping from my clammy temples.

Seeing my condition, Lebrun fetched a glass of water and offered it to me with a steady hand.

'No, no!' I gasped hoarsely, pushing the glass away. 'Take it to her. For Heaven's sake, bring her back to life!'

'No, not for the sake of Heaven,' he replied solemnly. 'The thing is done, and think you it was done carelessly, lightly—a thing to be undone at your bidding? You should know me better. Drink,'

he added imperatively, pushing the glass to my lips. 'Get back your strength. I have need of help. What's the time? In a few hours it will be morning. We must get this poor dead body out of sight before the police take me, unless you wish to have me shut up for life in a madhouse as a madman and the murderer of my own daughter.'

I gulped the water down, partly from my habit of obedience to Lebrun's commands, partly from the dread of those consequences he indicated, and then, nerving myself to the horrible task before me, I rose to my feet mechanically, for my will seemed to have lost its power, and my faculties to need the guidance of another mind.

The old man's wits were as keen as mine were dull. His movements were sharp and decisive, his eye was bright with mental activity.

'You are stronger now,' he said, grasping my arm, as if to impart his own vigour to my lax muscles. 'Good. We must carry the body downstairs to the laboratory. It will not be found there. Are you ready?'

I drew a long breath and rubbed the sweat off my hands, as I summoned up my forces.

'Wait—you said the police were against the shop-door?'

I nodded assent. My tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth. I doubt if a sound could have passed my clogged throat.

'We must make no noise. Your shoes are off—right. Where are my slippers?'

I fetched a pair of felt slippers, which he put on in place of his boots. I should not have thought of taking this precaution in my present state. All that I could do was to obey his orders.

‘We must have light, but it won’t be safe to use a lamp. What’s to be done?’

After a moment’s reflection an expedient occurred to him. He left me abruptly, and I heard a stair creak, showing that he had gone downstairs. Then an unreasoning terror seized me in finding myself alone with the dead girl. It was that fear of the supernatural which possesses children and people of weak intellect, for what earthly thing was there to dread from the dead body of that poor child? I must say again for my excuse that the shock had unseated my reason. I dared not turn my eyes in the direction of the corpse, and it was with a feeling of intense relief that I hailed the return of the old man.

‘Time presses, John. It is nearly two. Come, we must be quick,’ he said, drawing me towards the dead girl. And then, as I drew back with instinctive repugnance, covering my eyes with my hand: ‘What, afraid to look at my little Daffy? It cannot hurt you; this poor body is but clay. Come, help me lift it, for you have more strength than I. Why, I have seen you lift her on your shoulder when she was a child.’

At these words the recollection of her childhood, of the days when this dear girl and I were play-mates, warmed my benumbed heart with a flow of

passionate affection, chasing away the ghastly sentiments that had frozen up my blood, and I lifted her tenderly in my arms, drawing her to my breast and bending down to breathe upon her icy cheek with some mad hope that I could warm her back to life.

We carried her together to the stairs and cautiously descended. At the angle half-way down Lebrun bade me pause, that we might regain strength to make the remainder of our way in greater safety. In a corner he had placed a bottle of phosphorus, that shed a faint greenish light. A spectral picture it fell upon, giving a livid tint to our faces, the look of marble to the set features of the dead burden in our arms.

After a minute's pause we went on again, reaching the shop and turning the corner to the recess below the stairs. The doors of the laboratory were wide open, and within the feeble glimmer of the lamp, turned down to its lowest point, faintly illumined the passage.

'Leave us, John,' said Andrew Lebrun, when we had laid Daphne's body upon the ground at the end of the laboratory. 'I shall lock the doors. Put out the light in the sitting-room and go to bed.'

I was kneeling beside Daphne. Looking in her sweet still face, I could not move for the thought that I should see her no more, and then for the first time tears came, and I cried like a child.

'Go, my poor John, go,' said Lebrun, tapping my shoulder.

I rose and went away, he following to close the

door after me, and, having extinguished the lamp in the sitting-room, I paused before going up to my chamber, overcome by a feeling of misery and desolation. The fire was quite out now ; the room was black and silent. I thought of Daphne sitting there making good resolutions and forcing herself to take a hopeful view of life, and I would have given my soul to recall her.

I flung myself upon my bed, dressed as I was, not to repose, for sleep was out of the question, but to wait for morning, and the further development of the tragedy which must come with it. Yet I tried to sleep, resorting to every device I could think of to procure forgetfulness and shut out the horrible phantasmagoria that passed before my imagination. But through all these devices the image of Daphne, lying still and cold in the laboratory, stood out before my mind's eye, and horrible speculations as to the means by which Andrew Lebrun was disposing of his daughter's body crowded each other out of my throbbing brain.

The terrible hours dragged slowly on, and yet I could not hope for the night to end, knowing the fate that awaited my old master in the morning. I need not open the shop till eight, but after that to keep it closed would arouse suspicion, and involve the discovery of a deed far more terrible than the killing of Percival Somerset. When the clock of Spitalfields Church began the fifteen minutes' chime with which it awakes the neighbourhood, a feverish

anxiety seized me with the anticipation that Lebrun's strength would be unequal to his task, and that he would be found with his awful work but half finished. Then it occurred to me that the old man, seeing escape impossible, and having nothing to attach him to life now that all he loved was lost, would put an end to his own life, and that his body would be found lifeless beside the corpse of his daughter.

At that moment my staring eyes, fixed upon the darkness, perceived the dawning of a yellowish light, and presently in its midst a livid, haggard face, which I recognised as my master's. I started up upon the tumbled bed, for at the moment I verily believed I saw a ghost; but as he advanced I saw that it was indeed Lebrun himself, carrying the phosphorus lamp in his hand.

He set down the bottle on a chest of drawers, and seated himself like one utterly worn out with fatigue by my side, and by the dim light I observed that he held something white in his hand.

For some moments he was too exhausted to speak, but at length, rousing himself, he said:

‘What do you think they will do with me?’

‘Do, sir?’ I stammered.

‘If I can show by a full statement that I was justified in shooting Somerset?’

‘Why, sir, an acknowledgment of guilt must of course entail punishment. You may even be convicted of murder, and not of manslaughter simply; but the sentence of death will surely be remitted to imprisonment.’

‘For how long?’

‘I believe the full term is twenty-one years.’

‘Twenty-one years. I shall be eighty-three then, if I live; but you will be no more than fifty, or thereabouts. Eighty-three—it is hardly possible. Well, well! Here are the keys of the laboratory, John. I give them to you, and I ask you to guard them with your life. Let no one enter the laboratory while I live. Daphne is there.’

I took the keys and gave him my promise. Then, after a pause, he spoke again.

‘Take this paper and keep it as safely as you guard the keys,’ said he, handing me the white packet I had observed. ‘If I am hanged, or if I die in prison before my term is ended, open the paper and carry out faithfully the simple instructions I have written down. Will you promise to do this, my dear friend?’

There was tenderness in his voice as he spoke, and emotion shook mine as I pressed his hand and made this second promise.

‘I trust you, John; you have never failed me. And now,’ he added, rising, ‘Come down with me to the shop door. I have kept the men there waiting long enough. I am ready.’

CHAPTER XXI.

OUR ENEMY, MR. DAVID LEIGH.

THE mental energy which had given my poor old master strength to go through the ordeal of the night forsook him now that his fearful task was accomplished. His steps tottered as he went towards the stairs, and he grasped the banister on one side and laid his hand against the wall on the other as he slowly descended. I induced him to sit down in the kitchen while I made a strong cup of coffee. He ate the food I laid before him ravenously—it is quite possible that none had passed his lips the day before—and that, with the coffee, revived him considerably. He repeated the instructions he had given me at the bedside, and when I had again given him a promise to obey his orders implicitly, he rose, and giving me his hand, said:

‘Farewell, my friend.’

Holding his hand, I begged him to let me employ a solicitor to defend him in court, but he refused emphatically.

‘I trust to the sense and feeling of the honest men who will decide my fate,’ said he. ‘If the plain truth will not lead them to treat me leniently, a lie cannot.’

We grasped each the other’s hand once more as I unbolted the street door, and he crossed the threshold with a firm step.

The men were not in the casement of the door, but through the fog, now growing yellow with the light of day, I descried dimly two figures pacing the pavement at a little distance from the house. Andrew Lebrun walked up to them and asked:

‘Are you waiting for the man who shot Percival Somerset last night?’

On their replying in the affirmative, he said:

‘I am he. My name is Andrew Lebrun.’

One of the men at once seized his arm.

‘My good fellow,’ remonstrated my master, ‘if I meditated escape, I should not have given myself up.’

The response came indistinctly to my ear as the figures faded away into the fog. I stood gazing into the blank wall of fog for some moments, and then, without changing my position, I looked round at the closed door of the laboratory, faintly illumined by the lamp I had brought down from above and set upon the counter. My heart felt like a lump of lead in my breast, with a sentiment of utter desolation, accentuated by the stillness and the absence of life and movement without. It seemed as if I were left alone in a dead world, with no creature in it to love, no object to live for.

Could I do nothing to revoke the past? I asked myself, my torpid wits quickening under the sting of desperation—nothing to awake that dear young voice that had made this house once gay with her song and laughter?

The keys were in my hand. The thought of breaking my promise, of disobeying my master for the

first time, crossed my mind, but as quickly the vain project was chased away by a perception of my helplessness. It was absurd to think that the father, with all the resources of science at hand, should do a work of that kind ineffectually, giving his beloved child the horrible possibility of reviving to find herself buried alive. And then, thinking of my master, I thrust the keys further in my breast, that they might not tempt me to a mad enterprise which might reveal that darker deed—a deed which must strike all the world with horror and hush the voice of clemency.

The clatter of milk-pails in the street brought me back to ordinary considerations of the day. I took down the shutters, lit the gas-jet over my bench, and, taking out the tools, set about my customary occupation. Yet now and then my hand would be arrested by a fancied sound, and more than once I crept stealthily to the laboratory door and laid my ear against the panel, holding my breath to listen. Not a sound came from within; the silence of a tomb reigned there, and a tomb indeed it was for that sweet girl who had been the light of my life.

At mid-day I locked up the shop door and went out to get my dinner at an eating-house in Union Street.

‘Now I am quite alone,’ thought I, ‘it will be better to go out for my meals. I shall save in the long run, and at any rate, I must meet some of my fellow creatures.’

But my real object was to avoid going upstairs

and sitting down alone at the table where I had found such happiness in the society of the friends who were never more to sit together there.

Outside a newsvendor's at the corner of Church Street I caught sight of a newspaper bill, and saw these lines printed in large letters :

TRAGEDY AT THE MOMUS.

MR. SOMERSET SHOT.

Lebrun had given me no particulars of the event, and this was the first intimation I had of his shooting Somerset in the theatre, but curiosity did not tempt me to buy a newspaper, for the details of that crime sank into insignificance beside the catastrophe which had closed the tragic day.

When I returned to Weaver Street I perceived a tall, gentlemanly young fellow standing on the kerb opposite the shop. A hansom was drawn up close by.

'Someone from the police-court come to make inquiries. I must be on my guard,' thought I.

I opened the door, and the gentleman followed me into the shop. He regarded me attentively and in silence as I took off my hat and placed myself behind the counter.

'Miss Lebrun is not at home?' he said.

'No, sir,' I replied, putting on my apron.

'Nor Mr. Lebrun?'

At this question I perceived that the visitor could not have come from the police-station, and this, with his previous inquiry, led me at once to conclude that

he was Mr. David Leigh. And now I looked at him hard, and with a bitter feeling of hatred in my heart. Yet there was nothing in his appearance to dislike. He was well-built and handsome, with none of those signs of sensual indulgence and moral weakness which had prejudiced me against Mr. Somerset. No, he reminded me rather of a young fellow I had picked out of the Oxford crew at the last boat-race as a type of a healthy and honest English gentleman. His features were strong and well cut, and his dark brown eyes had a look of grave earnestness that gave value to their tenderness. But, remembering what my master had said, and thinking of little Daphne, who, but for this man, would have been living now, I saw in him only a representative of an idle and mischievous class, whose sole end in life is pleasure, whose only god is self. A vindictive sentiment envenomed my heart, and, disturbing my reason, led me to look on this young man as the author of all the misfortunes that had befallen us.

‘No, sir,’ said I harshly, when at length I replied : ‘Mr. Lebrun is not here.’

‘I came to that conclusion when no one answered my ring,’ he said, in a grave, calm tone, taking no heed of my hostile appearance. ‘You are Mr. Grey, I think?’

‘Yes, my name is John Grey.’

‘Mine is David Leigh.’

‘So I thought,’ said I, with a rude inflection of the voice that must have betrayed my hatred of his complacent, smooth-speaking class.

‘Can you tell me where I may find Mr. Lebrun and his daughter?’

‘No, I can’t.’

‘You will tell me at least how long they have been gone?’

‘I haven’t said that Miss Lebrun has been here.’

‘But I know that she has by your recognising me; for until she left Lowestoft yesterday she had no intention of disclosing my existence.’

‘She may be at Lowestoft still. How do you know?’

‘Because I accompanied her to London and put her in the cab that brought her here. Mr. Grey,’ he continued, in the same tone of self-restraint, after a momentary pause, ‘you may have reason to regard me as a self-seeking and unscrupulous person, but, admitting that your prejudice is well-founded, you must see that my object in making these inquiries is to aid Mr. Lebrun, if it is possible, in escaping the consequences of what happened last night. The newspaper report, and the facts I gathered at the theatre this morning, leave no doubt, unhappily, that the man who shot Mr. Somerset was Andrew Lebrun. We who know the circumstances of the case can justify that act, but to those who judge him without our sympathy his offence will be murder with premeditation. The result of his conviction would be not less terrible for Miss Lebrun than it is for her father——’

‘And you,’ I added, goaded on by my jealousy, by the fate awaiting my poor old master—‘you say

nothing of the consequences to yourself. Your fine friends will turn their shoulder on a man who dares to marry the daughter of a convicted murderer, eh?’

‘For Heaven’s sake sink all sentiments of personal animosity at this time!’ he replied, with still greater earnestness. ‘Regard me simply as a means of saving your friends from a great calamity—employ the means and influence I possess to avert a greater misfortune than has yet befallen this unhappy family. All that I have I will place at their disposal if you do but tell me where I may find them.’

‘Tell *you* where to find the man who shot your friend! Do you think me a fool? Oh, I know you, and I should count myself something more than a fool—a villain as base as yourself or your friend who was killed last night—if I suffered myself to be duped by your pretended sympathy. You have ruined this family between you. Before you crossed their path there was none happier in all the world than they. I stand here in the place of Andrew Lebrun, and I warn you to begone, lest the spirit of vengeance that raised his hand against your friend should lift mine against you.’

He regarded me fixedly for a moment or two, not with the contempt which perhaps my furious accusations and threats merited, certainly without fear, but with an expression of grave commiseration; then he inclined his head and left the shop. He must have seen that in my present condition I was incapable of listening to reason, and that argument would only

increase my fury ; indeed, I was beside myself with passion, thinking always of Daphne's end, and accepted for fact every wild suspicion that rose in my heated imagination. I can understand how little provocation is needed at such a time to make one man take the life of another.

About three Mr. Leigh returned, and, entering the shop hastily with a paper in his hand, he said :

‘ Mr. Lebrun is taken. Have you seen the afternoon paper ?’

‘ He gave himself up at seven o'clock this morning,’ said I sullenly, my passion having subsided in the interval.

‘ And Miss Lebrun, where is she ?’

‘ Where you will not find her,’ I replied fiercely.

‘ In that case you must give me credit for sincerity, Mr. Grey, in wishing still to do what is possible to save her father. If you have not already consulted a solicitor, you must suffer me to do what is necessary for Mr. Lebrun's defence.’

‘ He needs no defence. He will not accept the services of a solicitor ; least of all would he accept help from you.’

‘ Are you sure of that ?’

‘ As certain as if I were speaking for myself ; and I tell you, Mr. Leigh, that if I were drowning and you held out your hand to save me, I would not take it.’

He nodded in acquiescence, but there was a look of perplexity in his eyes. No doubt Daphne had spoken kindly of me, with a smile or two maybe at

the simplicity of my character, and he must have found it difficult indeed to reconcile her description of my meek spirit with the ferocious enmity I now exhibited—not knowing that Lebrun had killed his child, and that he was the cause.

CHAPTER XXII.

I AM WARNED THAT MY EVIDENCE MAY HANG ANDREW LEBRUN.

As the news spread that Andrew Lebrun had shot his son-in-law at the Momus Theatre, the neighbours dropped in one after the other to make inquiries, under the guise of sympathy, and gratify their curiosity. They got little enough out of me, and my curt replies were given with an ill grace. I wanted to be alone, to brood over this terrible misfortune as persons of my disposition are inclined to; and these idle questions goaded me beyond endurance.

‘You know more than I do if you have read the papers. I have not. You see I am busy. Good-afternoon.’

That was my reply as I stuck the glass in my eye and bent over my bench.

But as I was shutting up the shop a visitor called who was not to be shaken off so easily. He was a round little gentleman, with a full face, small, shrewd, twinkling eyes, and a cheerful expression.

‘Mr. John Grey, I believe?’ he began.

‘Yes,’ I replied, screwing up the shutter-bolt.

‘I must have a word or two in private with you, my dear sir.’ He stepped into the shop and himself closed the door quietly but firmly. ‘Anyone upstairs?’

‘No.’

‘Then we can have our little talk here,’ said he, casting a comprehensive glance round the shop and seating himself by the counter, the more conveniently to open a small bag he carried in his hand. ‘I am the representative of Messrs. Lawrence and Lawrence,* solicitors. Dare say you have heard of us.’

Of course I had heard of them, the most eminent firm of solicitors in London, and I was not a little surprised that they should be represented by such a queer little man; but I have found out since that he is employed by them in cases where tact and finesse are required to ‘draw’ a reluctant witness, give confidence to a timid one, or tackle any business which it would be *infra dig.* for the principals to touch.

‘Sad case this of your poor old friend, Mr. Andrew Lebrun—dear old gentleman!’ The little man clapped on a pair of glasses and glanced at a folded sheet of foolscap he had fished out of his bag, probably to refresh his memory. ‘We take an enormous interest in this affair, you know,’ he continued, running his eye down his notes. ‘Young Mr. Richard sent for me the moment he read the

* Here, as elsewhere, I have substituted fictitious for real names.
—J. G.

news in the evening paper. "Blatherwick," says he, "you must look to this at once. No matter if it is late, you must go down to Weaver Street immediately and see what can be done. Mr. Somerset has been found dead in his theatre, and Mr. Andrew Lebrun is under arrest on suspicion of having murdered him—the most improbable thing I ever heard of, but still a very dangerous one, considering the circumstances of the case. I say improbable advisedly," says Mr. Richard, "because I know Mr. Andrew Lebrun. I met him once at Park Lane in the house of that scamp Somerset, who married his daughter—the most charming lady I ever met in all my life—and I was struck by his noble appearance and the enormous range of his intellect. That old gentleman is as incapable of committing murder as I am, and if it costs me a thousand pounds I'll get him off. I remember, in the course of conversation, Mr. Lebrun told me that he was a clockmaker, but that his business was conducted by a Mr. John Grey—a most skilful and excellent workman, and the most faithful and worthy friend that ever man was blessed with. Now you must find Mr. John Grey at once, and learn from him the particulars of the case, that we may know what line of defence to take."

I was too much flattered by this speech to be struck at the time by the retentiveness of Mr. Richard Lawrence's memory, or the expansive confidence of my old master, who usually was particularly reticent in speaking of his personal affairs.

'I know absolutely nothing about the case,' said I.

‘So much the better. We can have you in the witness-box without hesitation. As a workman of regular habits, you doubtless go to bed before your master, and so would not know at what hour he came home last night.’

‘I was up when he came in; it was past midnight.’

‘That’s a serious objection,’ said Mr. Blatherwick, pencilling a note. ‘Of course, he told you nothing that might lead you to suspect——’

‘I believe Mr. Lebrun intends to plead guilty.’

‘Hush!’ whispered the little gentleman, glancing round him in alarm. ‘Not so loud. My dear sir, you should never make an admission of that kind.’

‘I simply state my master’s intention.’

‘We must alter his intention at once.’

‘I know Andrew Lebrun too well to believe that possible.’

‘A suicidal policy. If he pleads guilty the jury has no option but to convict, and at the best he must end his days in prison. If he pleads not guilty we can get him off as sure as quarter sessions. Take the facts: Mr. Somerset, a well-known gambler and a scoundrel, is found shot in his private room at the theatre, with a revolver almost at his feet. It may be proved that Mr. Lebrun was in the theatre half an hour before the discovery was made. No one saw the deed committed; no one saw Lebrun in possession of that revolver. We admit that Lebrun went to the Momus to reproach Somerset with his shameful behaviour towards his wife, Mr. Lebrun’s

beautiful daughter, and we conclude that, remorse touching the conscience of Somerset, he shot himself. The jury must acquit, and we come off with flying colours.'

I shook my head, despite Mr. Blatherwick's tone of conviction.

'Why not?' he asked.

'Because my master would not allow justice to miscarry by a suppression of the truth.'

'Surely, for the sake of his family, if not for his own——'

Again I shook my head as the melancholy thought crossed my mind that now my dear old master had no one in the world to consider. Mr. Blatherwick put on his glasses with a rueful sigh, and consulted his notes again.

'As a man of science, your friend Mr. Lebrun must have been peculiar in his ways now and then.'

'He was not an ordinary man in any sense.'

'Ah! I dare say his friends thought him eccentric, odd—neighbours, you know.'

'It is possible.'

'You never heard anyone suggest that he might be a little deranged here?' (tapping his forehead).

'Oh, well, I have heard his sister-in-law declare that he was out of his senses, but she is a fool.'

'A most excellent woman all the same,' said Mr. Blatherwick eagerly. 'Give me her name and address, if you please.'

I gave Mrs. Masson's address, which he wrote down with great care.

‘And now, Mr. Grey, I dare say, if you were under examination, you could give more than one instance in which Mr. Lebrun has shown intellectual weakness. Great minds to madness are allied, you know.’

‘No, sir, I never knew my master act unreasonably, or without careful deliberation.’

Mr. Blatherwick laid down his pencil and looked at me with an expression of mingled pity and disgust. He must have been asking himself what on earth I was fit for, and he must have concluded that I was certainly not fit for the witness-box. When he returned to the charge it was clearly with a faint heart.

‘A jury might still be persuaded to return a verdict of not guilty, even if Lebrun admits firing the shot, and we broke down in attributing the act to temporary insanity, supposing that we can convince them that there was no premeditation or express malice. As a man with many enemies and constantly in danger of a thrashing, Mr. Somerset would probably keep a revolver in his room. Now, Mr. Lebrun, in a moment of terrible exasperation, of outraged feeling, of instinctive justice—Mr. Lebrun, I say, may, in that fit of passionate resentment, have caught up the pistol and fired it without reflection. It is most unlikely that a peaceful, meditative man of science would carry a weapon of that kind—in all probability, if a pistol were put in his hand, he would not be able to show how it was used. We might rely on you to swear that you had never seen him with any weapon of destruction in his hand.’

‘No, sir, I could not swear to that, for I saw him

a week ago with a revolver, practising at a mark upon the wall.'

'Mr. Grey,' said the little man, rising in desperation, 'unless you wish to hang your friend, you had better get right out of this country till the trial is over. If the prosecution subpoena you, not Lawrence and Lawrence, with all the Queen's Counsel to back them, can save Andrew Lebrun.'

I myself was so convinced that my evidence must damage my master, and I had such a natural dread of public examination, that before Mr. Blatherwick went away I gave him my promise to close the house and keep out of sight while the trial was pending.

Nevertheless, I had promised to guard the laboratory, and, knowing the terrible secret it might reveal, I felt that I must still come to the house at night to watch the dead.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DAVID LEIGH SHAKES MY PREJUDICE.

BEING a born shopkeeper, and practical and methodical by long habit, I looked about me as soon as Mr. Blatherwick was gone to see how I was to execute the promise I had given him. I was not a whit less anxious to escape the witness-box than he to get me out of the way. Still—business! Happily, there were not many repairs in hand, and what remained unfinished could be done in a few hours.

'A cup of tea will freshen me up and steady my

nerves,' said I to myself. 'I'll get the lot done before I go to bed.'

But, quite worn out by the long strain on body and mind, I unconsciously dozed off before my cup was emptied, and with no better pillow than my crossed arms spread on the kitchen table, I slept like a log till the morning.

It was five o'clock when I woke, but, my forces restored by repose, and invigorated by a good sousing in cold water, I set to work with a sure hand, and finished off in a couple of hours what might have cost me four hours' toil overnight; put away my tools, packed up my repairs in neat boxes, addressed them from my day-book (in which I never fail to enter the customers' names) to post when I went out; then, having carefully fastened all the doors and windows and lingered for one aching moment at the door of the laboratory, I left the old house, locking the door after me, and went my way with a dull, sore heart.

Instinctively I turned my steps towards Clerkenwell after going to the post, and there I found some jobbing work to do at an old friend's, for which I was heartily thankful, for occupation seemed an absolute necessity to distract my thoughts from the trouble, which I felt must unsettle my reason if I gave way to the morbid reflections it provoked.

I did not leave Clerkenwell till late that night; it was past ten when I reached Weaver Street. The shops were closed, the street was quite still and deserted. With a strange mingling of repulsion and

attraction, I approached the old bay-fronted shop, dreading that house of death, yet eager to assure myself that the dread secret of the laboratory had not been discovered. As I put the key in the door to let myself in I observed with surprise a card nailed on the shutter, on which, by the light from the street-lamp, I managed to decipher the words : 'All communications for Mr. Lebrun to be addressed to Mrs. Day, 14, Weaver Street.'

No. 14 was just opposite. I knew Mrs. Day quite well, but I had given her no instructions to post this notice or answer applications. Who had ? Speculations on this matter were banished from my thoughts by the grim terror that possessed me as I entered the shop and closed the door behind me—a terror which was none the less striking because it had been anticipated. I had stopped the clocks before leaving, and now the complete silence dismayed me. Then I became aware of a faint unnatural light in the place, unnoticeable at first, but sufficient to reveal the white patches of the clock dials on the walls as my eyes became accustomed to the obscurity. It seemed to come from the stairs—that sickly, greenish gleam, like the unearthly light that emanates from corrupting animal matter and hangs over graveyards. The cause I found (when my quaking limbs gained strength to move) was nothing more than the bottle of phosphorus left in the angle of the staircase by Andrew Lebrun ; but at the sight of it the scene of the night came before my eyes again, and I saw the old man pausing for breath, his mouth and

deep-sunk eyes forming black patches in his face, made ghastly by that pale green light, and the figure of poor Daphne lying dead between us.

I tried the laboratory door ; it was fast. Pausing there, the thought of resuscitation returned to my mind. I could not call, for my tongue clove to the roof of my mouth, but I knocked at the door with I know not what desperate hope. A hollow metallic echo from within was the only response. Softly, as if fearing to awake a sleeper, silently as one moves in the presence of the dead, I unfastened the back door and went out into the garden, to complete my inspection and keep faith with Lebrun. There it was pitch dark, but the high stacks of timber faintly reflected the glow that hangs ever over the city, and against the gray mass I could define the outline of the laboratory roof, standing out in a black angle. I groped my way round the three sides, to know that the walls were untouched. The fog had left a clammy moisture upon the drooping plants in Daphne's garden ; the damp growth clung about my feet like invisible hands. At one point my heart ceased to beat and my hair stood on end, as something slid away beneath my foot and rustled through the matted growth. I knew by the sound of its claws as it sprang up the wall, and its cry as it made its way into the timber stacks, that it was but a cat, yet even that terrified me.

Returning to the house, I lit a lamp and went upstairs. All was safe there. My duty was done, and I might leave the place as quickly as I pleased ; yet I

lingered at the door of the sitting-room, as my eye fell upon the piece of woolwork Daphne had laid upon the table, my heart overwhelmed with bitter grief, as I said to myself :

‘All that good purpose was for nothing. The dear little hands that would have done so much are still now. The work will never be finished.’

I put out the lamp and opened the door quietly, eager now to get away from this house of desolation. A man in a long ulster stood on the pavement facing me, waiting for me. At the first glance I thought it must be an officer there to serve me with a subpoena to appear at the trial against my old master, but the next moment I perceived that it was Mr. Leigh.

‘I saw you go in,’ he said. ‘I have been looking for you all the evening, thinking you might have occasion to come here.’

‘What do you want?’ I asked curtly.

‘Will you give her this letter?’ he asked.

We were beneath a lamp. I saw that the letter he offered was addressed to Daphne. I shook my head in silence. He broke the cover, and offering it again, said :

‘Read it if you will. If there is a single word which you yourself might not write to a friend in distress, destroy it.’

‘I have no wish to read your letter.’

‘Will you give her a message from me—a couple of words?’

There was a pathetic vibration in his deep, soft voice, denoting true feeling.

‘No,’ I replied.

‘You know where she is?’ he asked quickly, as if it had suddenly occurred to him that he had been deceiving himself.

‘Yes.’

‘I felt sure of that, knowing from what she has told me that she has no better friend than you. It isn’t likely that you would leave her at such a time as this. Perhaps within this hour you have been with her. Will you not tell me how she bears this trouble?’

‘I can tell you nothing.’

‘Not if I promise, if I give you my word of honour, to make no endeavour to find her?’

‘I cannot speak of her,’ I said, in a thick voice.

I would have got away from him, but he quickened his pace to mine, and, in a tone of entreaty, said :

‘Put yourself in my place, Mr. Grey. Suppose that I had taken her from you, and that your heart and soul were racked with anxiety for that frail, sensitive girl borne down by an unparalleled affliction—the loss of a sister one day, of a father the next—would you not pray for tidings of her, and think me inhuman to deny you a single word—one word to tell you if she lives or not?’

‘Think what you like of me. I’ll not tell you even that.’

I could not doubt the sincerity of his affection for Daphne, and this, with our community of sympathy, disposed me to feel more kindly than I had yet felt towards Mr. Leigh. But how could I answer his

questions without revealing the fact which it was so necessary to conceal? The appearance of hostility gave a colourable explanation to my reticence, and I determined to maintain the attitude I had taken, and suffer him to believe me churlish, brutal—what he would—rather than awaken his suspicion of the truth by excusing my silence. So I turned my shoulder on him brusquely at the corner of the street, and left him standing there in despair of overcoming my stubborn antipathy.

These incidents chased the written notice on the shutter from my mind. I thought of it no more until it met my eye the next night, when I went to Weaver Street. There was a light in an upper window opposite, and to have an explanation at once, I crossed over and knocked at the door. My hand had scarcely left the knocker when the door opened, and to my surprise Mr. Leigh confronted me.

‘It is my turn now to ask what *you* want,’ he said, but not harshly.

‘I have come to ask Mrs. Day who posted that notice on the door.’

‘I posted it yesterday morning, when I took a room here.’

I understood now how he saw me enter the house the night before without my seeing him.

‘Will you come upstairs?’ he asked.

‘No.’

He inclined his head, put on his hat, and came out, closing the door behind him.

‘There are no degrees in sincerity. One must be a true friend or a false one,’ said he. ‘But the truest friends may be more or less considerate, and in that respect I think I have the advantage of you, Mr. Grey.’

‘In what respect?’

‘You have forgotten Mrs. Somerset. It hasn’t occurred to you that the wide-spread news of her husband’s death and her father’s arrest is more likely to reach her than all the inquiries of the agents employed by Mr. Somerset. Her first impulse will be to seek her sister and support her through this terrible trial. What would her feelings be to find the house closed and no tidings of her sister or you to be had?’

‘You believe that she lives?’ I asked, stopping short.

‘I am morally convinced that she lives, and only those whose judgment is perverted by dread would believe the contrary. Mrs. Somerset has too much strength of character to yield to the weakness of self-destruction. Had she met her death by accident, it is scarcely reasonable to believe that her body would have remained undiscovered.’

‘It is nearly three weeks since we heard from her.’

‘Illness would quite account for her silence.’

I remembered that this hypothesis was put forward by Mr. Long as the most likely explanation.

‘Do you know a Mrs. Watson?’ asked Mr. Leigh, after a pause.

‘Mrs. Watson—Mrs. Watson,’ I replied, taxing my recollection. ‘Where does she live?’

‘That is my secret. A pleasant, respectable, elderly woman, Mrs. Watson——’

‘No; I know no one of that name.’

‘She called to-day and asked where she could find you. She seemed very anxious to see you, but gave me her address with evident reluctance.’

‘This may be nothing but a trap to serve me with a summons.’

‘She would not have hesitated to give her address in that case. No; she was too genuinely simple, too obviously careful, for that. Can you think of no better solution?’

‘Good heavens, sir!’ I exclaimed. ‘Do you think she was sent by Mrs. Somerset?’

‘I do.’

‘Give me that address.’

‘What then?’

‘Why, I will go there at once.’

‘Is that all? I could have done as much four hours ago.’

‘Why didn’t you?’

‘Because I cannot give her a sister, and you can. I could satisfy but a small portion of my desires; you may give happiness to Daphne, take half the heavy burden from her soul, bring joy again to her stricken heart. Oh, I envy you!’ He stopped and drew a note-book from his pocket. ‘I meant to make terms with you,’ he continued, and then, checking himself with the address in his fingers,

‘and why shouldn’t I? You have treated me as if I were a designing scoundrel. Why should I use you like a gentleman? Come, Mr. Grey, I hold the whip now. What will you give me for this, that may bring a smile into that poor girl’s face? Will you carry her a message from me? Will you tell me if she is well or ill for the delight this piece of paper may bring you?’

I could make no answer. It was torture to hear him speak of Daphne as if she still lived.

‘Oh, mistrust me still,’ he said, giving me the address. ‘I knew by your manner when we met that she is better to-day than she was yesterday. I gauge your feelings by my own, and knew by your shaking voice last night that she was passing through a crisis, by your steadier nerve to-night that her danger is past. I’ll content myself with that. But you shall promise me’—laying hold of my arm—‘that you will meet me here to-morrow night and tell me more.’

I gave him that promise and he let me go.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THÉRÈSE IS FOUND.

‘IF this great hope is realised—if I meet Mrs. Somerset—what shall I say? How reply to her inquiries without betraying the awful truth known only to her father and me?’

These questions were still running through my mind when, with trepidation, I rang Mrs. Watson's bell the next morning.

Myrtle Cottage was one of the few old-fashioned detached cottages which have not been swept away to give way to more pretentious houses upon Clapham Common—a square, snug little place, built in the simple style of fifty years ago, with jalousies to the upper windows, a veranda, and a French window on each side of the front door, placed symmetrically in the middle. Some chrysanthemums still bloomed in the flower borders; a gardener was sweeping up the brown chestnut leaves that had fallen on the neatly-kept lawn. One could see by the prevailing look of neatness and propriety the owner must be a nice comfortable person, with a few old-fashioned notions, and a little unostentatious pretence to gentility; and this impression was confirmed by the appearance of Mrs. Watson when she came to me in the little sitting-room, whither I had been led by a trim maid on giving my name. She was a spare, pretty little lady, with a fair skin and French curls of silvery white hair bobbing out from the edge of her cap. There was a sweet expression on her face, indicative of wholesome living and pure thoughts, dashed just now with a slight air of mystery as she softly closed the door.

‘Pray take a seat, Mr. Grey,’ said she, in a low voice and with a graceful movement of her hand, as she herself drew a chair towards the window, the better to look me in the face, I think. ‘I must ask

you one or two questions before I explain the reason of my visit yesterday to Spitalfields. In the first place, do you know a Mrs. Heath ?

‘Heath ? No, madam, I know no one of that name.’

‘Ah ! she said that probably you would not know her by that name, but you certainly would by her Christian name—Thérèse.’

‘Oh, I know her well enough ! Is she here ?’ I asked, in uncontrollable excitement.

‘Hush ! She is sleeping in the room above us.’

I murmured a devout exclamation of gratitude, and she bowed her head in accord.

‘You are a relative, perhaps, Mr. Grey ?’

‘No, only a friend—a shopman ; but I have lived like one of the family since my boyhood.’

‘And the name of that family, if I am not mistaken, is Lebrun. One moment, Mr. Grey—let me tell you at once that I put these questions from no feeling of idle curiosity ; but I read the papers and know why that house in Weaver Street is closed. And if this unhappy young lady is indeed the widow of that man who has been shot, I would not for the world that the dreadful news of her father’s act came to her ear just now. For she has been very ill, poor thing, ill almost beyond hope of recovery, delirious with brain fever for nearly three weeks, and it was only yesterday morning that she came to herself, and could make me understand what she had been craving for all through her illness. She has called you frequently, and Daphne——’

‘Her sister.’

‘And “Dear father—father!”—oh, so piteously!’

The little lady had to pause and wipe her dimmed spectacles at this recollection.

‘When she was first taken ill we tried to discover where her friends were, that we might communicate with them, Dr. Blandly and I; but we could find nothing, and even the letter she was writing when she broke down failed to give us a clue. This is the letter, which I have no hesitation in showing you.’

She took a folded sheet of paper from her purse and gave it to me.

The writing was little enough like Thérèse’s bold hand, the letters being ill-formed and irregular, the last being absolutely undecipherable.

‘Darling father,’ the letter began, ‘I can keep my secret no longer. I am very ill. Come to——’ A smudged blot showed where her hand had fallen powerless upon the page.

‘The poor soul had some faint recollection of writing this,’ pursued Mrs. Watson, as I returned the letter. ‘Almost her first words were “Has he come—my father?” Then, when I showed her the unfinished letter, she would have me write to him. But presently she changed her mind, saying that it would break her father’s heart to see her in this condition, for, raising herself upon her pillow, she had caught sight of her wasted face in the glass opposite, and asked if I would send Mary, our maid, to fetch Mr. John Grey, who lived at Andrew Lebrun’s, a clockmaker’s in Weaver Street. I had just been

reading the paper; it lay on the bed. She might almost have seen the dreadful news on the open page. The truth flashed upon me in a moment, and pushing the paper from the bed as if by accident, I promised I would go myself and speak to you. Then she begged me to tell no one but you about her. And I promised that, and I kept my promise, although Mr. Leigh gave me his card and did his best to find out what I wanted. He is very amiable and very gentlemanly, but he seemed to me a little too anxious to know my business; still I think,' said she, drawing herself up with a little smile of satisfaction and a shake of her curls—'I think I was a match for him.'

'Whatever shall I do?' said I, involuntarily giving utterance to the thought that oppressed me.

'Far be it from me, Mr. Grey, to suggest deceit; but if that is true which I suspect, I think you are bound by the precarious condition of this poor lady to suppress the truth for a while. When she is stronger the truth must be told her, but not yet. Dr. Blandly fears a relapse, and forbids excitement of any kind. He unwillingly consented to her seeing you when I spoke to him last night, and then only on condition that the interview did not extend beyond five minutes. You must evade direct statement, and speak happily if you can. The right thing will come to you at the right moment, I have little doubt, seeing that you have such deep feeling for the poor soul. Now I will go and see if she is awake.'

After a short absence Mrs. Watson returned and

led me up to Thérèse's room. My dear young mistress lay raised upon the pillow, one thin hand holding back the curtain, her face turned towards the door in expectation, and her dark eyes looking doubly large now by reason of the extreme emaciation of her face, full of eagerness. Her cheek had scarcely more colour than the pillow on which it lay, but it had lost none of its beauty to my eyes. Nay, its very thinness seemed to add to the delicacy and sweetness which characterized it. Indeed, my heart was filled with such joy in finding her living whom we had given up for dead and lost for ever, that the change which denoted so much suffering failed to shock me: that was but a poor price to pay for the happiness of getting her back, as it were, from the dead. And this feeling of infinite gratitude gave me the requisite audacity for facing the situation. I felt equal to telling any lie that occasion might require, and with a good grace.

‘You are not frightened at me, John?’ she asked, giving me her thin hand.

‘Frightened, my dear young lady? Why, how can I feel anything but satisfaction in finding you so much better than there was room to expect from Mrs. Watson’s account of your perilous illness? I declare you look as bright as ever, and if you have lost flesh a bit, what of that? ’Twill soon come back again, I warrant, now that the illness has passed.’

‘My father, John?’

‘He knows not a word of this, not a word.’

‘And Daphne?’

‘She knows no more; and with your permission I will not breathe a word of this matter to either until you are quite yourself again.’

‘But have they found out nothing—suspected nothing? It is three weeks since I wrote home, and the letters sent before that must have seemed strange.’

‘Why, to be sure, they were a little odd—ignoring as they did the matters we spoke of in ours. But we made excuses for you, saying that you were too much occupied with your own affairs to pay much attention to ours. And that prepared us in a measure for your silence. “It’s only we, who have nothing else to do, who can find time to think about the absent,” said I. “How can we expect a lady with half-a-dozen functions and things to attend in a day to sit down and write long letters to us?”’

‘That appears strange to me, John. I can hardly understand you reconciling yourselves so easily to forgetfulness. Still, papa was always so anxious to make my path easier—to efface himself, that my husband might have no cause to dislike me on his account. Yet, after three weeks’ silence, did you not think that something must have happened to me?’

‘Oh no, ma’am——’

‘Call me Thérèse.’

‘No, Thérèse, nothing out of the common.’

‘I shall understand it better when I grow stronger,’

she said, passing her thin hand over her forehead. 'No one went to Park Lane to inquire why I did not write?'

'Not a soul.'

'If you had you would have learnt that I was gone and that I should be found here. My husband knew where I was—that is, if he read my letter. Perhaps he may not have read it. He cared so little for me. He received so many letters, and I counted for so little. Knowing my hand, he may have thrown my letter in the fire unread.'

'In my turn, I should like to ask you one question.'

'What is that, John?'

'Why did you not come to us, instead of coming here?'

'I will tell you. When I left my husband I said to myself, "I will never go back again to him." But when my passion was past and I could think more reasonably, I felt that I was wrong, and that I ought to make a better struggle, that I ought to overcome my repugnance to certain things which shocked and horrified me, but which women who marry for position must endure. With that thought I went back to Park Lane, but the door was closed against me. Then I wrote to my husband, confessing my fault and asking him to pardon me and let me come back. With the belief that he would consent to my return, I thought it best to keep away from my father, who would not have allowed me to return. And every day I expected a letter from my

husband, accounting for his delay by the belief that he wished me to feel the punishment of my thoughtlessness before he gave way.'

CHAPTER XXV.

I BEGIN TO LIKE DAVID LEIGH.

I AM writing this history from recollections, unaided by any notes, and what I have narrated of my dialogue with Thérèse represents only the substance of what she said, without any attempt to render her manner, or even the exact words that she used. At first she spoke with difficulty, as if she had lost the faculty of speech by disuse; but as she proceeded her animation increased, and towards the end her sentences flowed so quickly as to be almost incoherent. At the same time the colour mounted to her thin cheek, and her eyes glistened with feverish excitement. Suddenly the hand upon which she had raised herself seemed to give way, and she sank back upon her pillow exhausted. But still her lips quivered, as if she would speak, and she was silent only for a few moments.

'Yes, yes,' she said, turning again to me; 'I will go back to him—my husband. It isn't too late. Perhaps he will like me better for this absence, and be readier to look over my fault. For it was a fault; I ought not to have left him. I married him for my own interest, and it is only fair that I should repay

him by devotion for what he has given me in money and position. I must still try to win his love; it's my duty to make his life better and happier if I may. For that reason, John, you must not tell my father that we are parted, for that would render my task only more difficult. Promise that you will keep my secret for old sake's sake.'

I gave her that promise, and she continued, with increasing earnestness:

'When I am strong enough I will do my duty, and perhaps if I win back my good looks he will be pleased with me once more. Oh, if he would only care for me a little—ever so little—I would be more patient and forbearing! A young wife is always exacting, isn't she, John? She expects so much; she has been led to encourage illusions which must be overcome. And it is so hard to live without them at first, to realize that men are not heroes, that one must be content with only a part of one's husband's love. We must accept that humiliation, we who marry in this way. And I will—I will, though he demand a greater sacrifice than I have yet made. I did give up my father—Daphne—all that I used to love; but it is easier to relinquish that than one's pride and self-respect.'

The door opened and Mrs. Watson returned, with a square-faced, austere-looking old gentleman, who scowled at me as he walked up to the bedside and took Thérèse's wrist in his hand.

'Oh, I am better, doctor, better,' said Thérèse, laughing at his grave expression. 'To-morrow, Mrs.

Watson, I shall be ready to read to you again. We will go on with that novel—I remember it—the story of two lovers who were happy——’

She sank down upon the pillow, babbling of this story with painful unconsciousness, while the doctor, without speaking a word, poured out a dose of the sedative mixture near at hand.

I felt that I had stayed already too long, and murmured something about going and calling again soon.

‘Call when ye like and as often as ye like,’ said the doctor brusquely, with an odd accent, ‘but if ye see my patient again within a fortnight, ye may just bring another doctor with you, for I’ll not answer for the consequences.’

Coming from the house, I caught sight of Mr. David Leigh on the path bordering the common opposite, bending down to caress a dog that cowered in abject timidity at his feet. It was a poor, miserable mongrel, all skin and bone, and the ugliest dog I have ever seen—too ugly to have an owner, and rendered too fugitive by ill-usage and the dread of sticks and stones to be taken by the police—an outcast waiting for the slow mercy of death. The poor brute turned over on his back at the touch of that kind hand, with a look in his bleared eyes, as if he would say, ‘Beat me if you like, master.’

‘After all,’ thought I, ‘he can’t be a bad sort. Dogs and children have the instinct to discern quicker than we those whose hearts are tender and true.’

As the latch of the gate fell, Mr. Leigh turned quickly and came towards me.

‘Is she there?’ he asked.

‘Thérèse is there,’ I replied pointedly, thinking that his mind still turned towards Daphne.

‘Thérèse I mean, of course. That is the doctor’s brougham over there. She is ill?’

‘Yes.’

‘Come, Grey, don’t be niggardly with your words at such a time as this,’ he said, in a tone of remonstrance, laying his hand on my arm and leading me to a bench by the roadside. ‘Joy in finding her alive should expand your feelings a little. Have I not done something to deserve your confidence? Tell me all you have learnt about her, there’s a good fellow.’

It seemed to me that he showed as much earnestness in his sympathy with Thérèse as he had shown on Daphne’s behalf, which surprised me. As he seated himself at my side, the mongrel lay down, curling himself up at his feet with a sigh of satisfaction. This mute testimony of faith and David’s remonstrance put me to shame somewhat.

‘It’s stupid to be unduly mistrustful,’ thought I. ‘This gentleman could learn all that he wants to know from the doctor or the servant if he chose to resort to indirect means instead of questioning me in a straightforward manner.’

And so, with this reflection, I related what had taken place pretty much as I have written it here. With his eyes fixed upon my face, he listened

eagerly to all I said, breaking the thread of my story by only one observation, and that was when I told him of Thérèse's promise to return to her husband when she regained strength.

'Thank Heaven she is spared that last humiliation!' said he fervently.

And when I came to the end of my interview with Thérèse he exclaimed softly:

'What a brave woman! One can't conceive a nobler character.'

Then, resting his elbow on his knee and his chin in his hand, he sat pensive and silent for some minutes. I made a movement as if to rise, and that recalling him to present considerations, he said:

'Thank you, Grey, for this. You are anxious to carry the good news to Daphne, I know. It will make her heart rejoice. I'll walk a little way with you, and we can settle what is to be done.'

We walked on, the mongrel following close at David's heel.

'A fortnight,' he continued reflectively. 'We shall know the worst by then, and she will be spared at least the distress of uncertainty. You will bring Daphne here?'

'The doctor forbids Thérèse to see anyone for a fortnight,' I replied evasively.

'That restriction cannot apply, surely, to a sister. It would be cruel to Daphne to deny her the happiness of nursing a dear sister and restoring her to health. There's no likelihood of her betraying the secret of her father's peril. The most thoughtless

girl has self-command and tact in time of need, and she is not so thoughtless as you may think—that poor little Daphne.’

I made no reply, and he, misconstruing my silence, pursued in a colder strain, after casting a glance at my sombre face :

‘I give you my word of honour, Mr. Grey, that I will not come near this place while Daphne is in that house.’

And then, after giving me time to reply and getting none, he went on :

‘You must think me a thorough-paced scamp—utterly untrustworthy and selfish.’

‘Oh, you’re not worse than your class, I dare say.’

‘What do you know of my class?’

‘What I have read in the papers.’

‘And those papers, I should say, take only one view of society, and that a very narrow one. My class, whichever it may be, is made up of good and bad units, like other classes. Is yours immaculate? Have you no black sheep in your flock? What do you charge us with—idleness and pleasure-seeking? Well, we should not have to seek pleasure if idleness were amusing. Idleness is an evil imposed upon us by birth, as toil is inherited by those who are born in poverty. Surely you, who would turn an unskilful hand out of the workshop, do not want those who have no vocation for handicraft, nor even the excuse of necessity, to elbow you in the labour market. Believe me, Mr. Grey, a man with ten thousand a year deserves lenient consideration, and

if he resist the temptations scattered in his path and keep a fairly clean conscience, he merits as much respect as the poor wretch who refrains from stealing a loaf of bread. So much in self-defence, for even a worm will turn, you know, and you've put your foot upon me more than once. Now to practical matters. May I ask if you are quite resolved that Daphne shall not go to Myrtle Cottage ?'

'Quite.'

'Then I may come here without hesitation as often as I like,' said he, with a deep breath, and a certain indication of satisfaction in his voice and manner that perplexed me.

But, indeed, I had as yet got but a partial glimpse into a character that was by no means superficial.

He stopped at the corner of a by-street and bade me 'good-bye,' but without offering me his hand ; and as I glanced back in crossing the road I perceived that he had gone into the baker's shop that forms the angle of the side street, and was regaling the mongrel with buns from the window.

'No, he can't be half a bad sort,' I said again to myself, feeling not a little ashamed of the part I had played towards him.

Certainly he had shown much more generosity in his judgment of me, for only perfect confidence in my good faith towards the Lebruns could have restrained him from making more persistent inquiry into the fate of Daphne. Had our positions been reversed, I should undoubtedly have accused him of

smuggling her out of the way, for selfish, if not for more unworthy, ends. And in this self-restraint on his part I observed that quality which distinguishes a gentleman from a person of low breeding. My reflections running on this way—for the fact is I was beginning to like Mr. Leigh—it struck me suddenly that if Andrew Lebrun had only known as much as I knew now of this gentleman, our little Daffy would still be with us, and perhaps with a long life of great happiness before her.

Ah! how ignorant we are where we should be wise, how little capable of judging others! Here was I, settling that this gentleman would have made Daphne a happy wife, upon no sounder evidence than a neatly-rounded speech and an act of kindness towards a starving mongrel.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE TRIAL OF ANDREW LEBRUN.

THÉRÈSE suffered a relapse, and for some days her fluctuating condition gave us cause for the gravest anxiety—the hopes of one day barely balancing the fears of the next. Then the scale turned steadily in the right direction, and we were assured by the doctor that her recovery depended simply upon a certain term of mental tranquillity. To ensure this repose it was absolutely necessary to keep her in ignorance of the train of events which had followed her disappearance until she had regained sufficient

strength to withstand the shock, and with this view it was agreed that no one should be allowed to see her, at least before her father's trial, except Mrs. Watson and the doctor, to whom the main points of his patient's history were confided. This arrangement was doubly acceptable to me, for besides my natural inability to conceal my thoughts and feelings, I had that to hide which must appal Thérèse even more than the death of her husband and the pending trial of her father. Sooner or later I should be called upon to account for the absence of Daphne, and my imagination failed to offer any expedient for averting a confession of the truth.

Every morning before going to my work I called at Myrtle Cottage to learn how Thérèse was getting on, for having no hope of Andrew Lebrun being acquitted, all my affection centred in her, as the one last member left to me of the family I had loved so dearly. Mrs. Watson received me with uniform kindness, and the better I knew her the more I found to admire in her disposition. Her even temper, large-hearted generosity and delicate refinement were the characteristics of a real gentlewoman, and the sorrows of her life—for she had lost husband and children—had served only to add a spirit of devout resignation to the sweetness of her nature.

I had still some money belonging to Andrew Lebrun, and this I ventured one day to offer Mrs. Watson to defray the expenses incurred by Thérèse's illness, but she would not accept it.

‘No, no,’ said she. ‘I engaged this poor lady to be my companion at so much a month, and if my regard for her was no more than that of an employer, I should feel it my duty to nurse her in sickness. After all, if I took this purse—and a very nice new purse it is too—to furnish the little luxuries necessary to a convalescent, do you think I could spend the money to greater advantage than you? Come, Mr. Grey,’ she continued, shaking her curls at me with a smile of intelligence as I drew a long face, perplexed by her question, ‘why should you make a secret of this? Although they come anonymously, do you think I do not know who sends these boxes of beautiful flowers and fruit every day?’

‘They are not sent by me,’ said I, gloomily enough.

‘It isn’t likely the doctor sends them, and who else is there but you and he to think of her?’

I knew. It was David Leigh who thought of Thérèse. But I said nothing, for I was vexed with myself, jealous of David for an act of kindness that I had overlooked. It seemed to me that I was being cut out and robbed of all I loved by this outsider—a man who had known the sisters but a few months was ousting me from the place I had held so many years.

He was always there, waiting at a little distance from the house to inquire about Thérèse’s condition, when I left Mrs. Watson.

‘That’s the advantage of dealing with men of regular habits, Grey,’ he observed one morning

jocosely, when my report had lightened his spirits. 'One knows exactly when and where to find them.'

I might have retorted that his habits were not less punctual than mine, for he never failed to meet me—no, not once. At first I thought he was watching the house to see if I had brought Daphne there, he being now fully convinced that the house in Weaver Street was uninhabited; but this suspicion quickly faded away, for his address and manner carried with them the conviction of perfect honesty on his part, which was incompatible with a secret purpose of espionage. And then again his sole anxiety appeared to be on Thérèse's account, as if he were quite content to leave Daphne to my care for the present, in the assurance that when Thérèse recovered I should be compelled to let them come together. But now these presents of flowers and fruit turned my jealous suspicions in another direction.

Perhaps, after all, his love for Daphne was not so passionate as I imagined.

'It may have been only a passing infatuation,' said I to myself. 'One could not look at the dear little soul without yearning for her. But out of sight is out of mind with these gentlemen in most cases. He certainly gave her up once before, because his affairs probably took him elsewhere, and he may be quite willing to give her up again if it suit him. He must have known Thérèse before he saw Daphne, and she is undoubtedly the more beautiful of the two sisters, and he may think that with her knowledge of society she would be a more

suitable wife than simple little Daphne. And he could make her his wife now that she is a widow and free to marry again.'

Then it suddenly struck me that, as the widow of Mr. Somerset, she would probably inherit what remained of his colossal fortune. And this at once settled the question in my opinion. Yes, he had his eye on that heritage, and these daily presents of flowers and fruit had a double significance. Oh, one of these days he would find means to let her know who had sent them, and the subtle trick would tell in his favour.

With such venomous suspicions rankling in my breast, and the growing conviction that David Leigh would get possession of Thérèse blinding me once more to the open and straightforward aspect of his character, I had much ado to conceal my hostile feelings and to reply with common civility to his pressing questions concerning Thérèse. I meditated once changing the hour of my visit, to deprive him of the small meed of satisfaction he got from these brief interviews, but the reflection that he might call upon Mrs. Watson as an alternative, and learn what he wanted by ingratiating himself with her, quickly led me to reject that notion, and I resolved, cost what it might, to keep them apart as long as I could.

My offensive rudeness and sullen antipathy must have perplexed Mr. Leigh considerably, but it never ruffled his temper. He was always the same—calm, self-possessed, gravely earnest at times, yet disposed

to be genial. He had sufficient perception to know that I mistrusted him now as much, if not more than, at our first meeting; but he made only one protest against it.

‘I can’t make you out, Grey,’ said he. ‘Either they were mistaken who told me you were a man of common-sense, with a gentle and kind disposition, or jealousy has changed you completely.’

It was true enough. I felt that my feelings were perverted and my judgment warped by the apprehension of losing the last of all I loved.

Meanwhile Thérèse regained health and strength rapidly, more rapidly than the doctor had anticipated. She was no longer confined to her bed; her mind resumed its normal placidity and vigour, and she began to rebel against the inactivity which the doctor, regarding the circumstances of her case, reluctantly imposed.

‘She has slept long enough,’ he said. ‘Now she needs exercise, and the sooner she gets it the better it will be for her.’

More than once Thérèse begged to see me, if only for a few minutes, that she might hear something of Daphne and her father: and she could not comprehend why this favour was denied her, and was mystified by the pretexts made by Mrs. Watson to postpone an interview. Happily, the trial was now close at hand.

When that day came I dared not go into the court, for fear of being recognised and called into the witness-box, but I hung about the doors, hoping

to get news yet dreading it. About four o'clock people began to stream out of the public entrance, and amongst them was a barrister, in gown and wig, talking confidentially to a stout little man, whom I recognised as Mr. Blatherwick. They paused on the steps, and the barrister, after giving some final words of instruction (as I conceived), turned and went back into the building, while Mr. Blatherwick bustled off and hailed a passing cab.

'Mr. Blatherwick,' said I, stepping to his side quickly. 'May I ask if it's all over?'

He turned and looked at me in perplexity for a moment. Then, with a nod of recognition, he replied :

'Didn't know you at first—recollect you now. Awful hurry—can't stop. If you want to know anything, better jump in and go as far as the inn with me.'

I accepted the offer with alacrity. Mr. Blatherwick gave directions to the cabman, and sinking down beside me, said :

'Ain't been in the court, Mr. Grey? No. Quite right too. Thought I could rely upon you for that'—with a significant grin. 'Well, it's gone off all right, thanks to *us*.'

'What, sir?' I cried, trembling with excitement. 'Have they found a verdict of not guilty?'

'Why, how on earth could they do that, the prisoner insisting on pleading guilty? Did the best they could—convicted him with a strong recommendation to mercy.'

‘And the judge has let him off?’

‘Let him off!’ echoed Mr. Blatherwick, in a tone of supreme disgust. ‘Don’t you ever see a newspaper, Mr. Grey? Did you ever hear of a judge letting him off’—with another grimace at the illegal term—‘when a jury has convicted a prisoner of wilful murder? All he had to do was to put on the black cap and pass sentence of death.’

‘The sentence of death passed upon Andrew Lebrun!’ I exclaimed aghast.

‘Of course.’

‘And you call that all right—thanks to you?’

‘Why, to be sure. If it hadn’t been for us the old man would have swung or got a lifer. As it is, he has that recommendation to mercy.’

‘And what good is that if the judge sentences him to death after all?’

‘’Pon my word, Mr. Grey, you make me feel quite ill. Bœotian simplicity ain’t in it. Why, don’t you know, my poor friend, that with that recommendation we can appeal to the Home Secretary and get a reprieve—imprisonment during her Majesty’s pleasure, which means next to nothing in the way of punishment. Why, if the oracle is worked right, we may get the old gentleman out of limbo in a few months.’

The prospect of this speedy release, of seeing my dear old master again in so short a space of time, staggered me almost as much as the news that he had been condemned to death. It seemed almost too good to be true.

After a pause, as practical considerations dawned on my mind, I said :

‘Can you tell me how much it will cost, Mr. Blatherwick, to work the oracle as you suggested?’

‘Oh, a pot of money. You see, everything has been done in the best style, regardless of expense. What with Q.C.’s and one thing and another, the bill’s bound to run into four figures.’

‘Four figures! Good heaven! I cannot raise that sum.’

‘M’ no. I suppose you can’t,’ observed Mr. Blatherwick dryly. ‘Nevertheless, the oracle *will* be worked. This verdict was a foregone conclusion the moment Lawrence and Lawrence took up the case, and we’ve prepared all the machinery for procuring the reprieve with the least delay possible. It only needs a touch to set it in motion, and that touch I’m instructed to give the moment I get back to the office. We may know the result to-morrow night, and I promise you the result will be—reprieve.’

I slapped my knee and stamped my foot with delight, and the tears sprang into my eyes.

‘God bless Messrs. Lawrence and Lawrence!’ I murmured. ‘Surely such generosity on the part of legal men of business was never before known. God bless them!’

‘Do you seriously believe, Mr. Grey, that we are playing this game all off our own bat for a bit of fun?’

‘Why, you intimated——’

‘I intimated! Well, thank heaven we’re nearly at the inn.’

‘But if your firm is not doing this act of mercy and benevolence, who is?’

‘Who? Why, who’s been working day and night this past fortnight, using his influence with friends in the House, tipping here, tipping there, planking down the pieces like a brick, and keeping us all up at high pressure, hey?’

‘I’m sure I don’t know.’

‘Then it’s high time you did, for I don’t hold with hiding a fine light under a bushel. There’s one man, and one only, you have to thank for saving your old friend’s life, and that man is Mr. David Leigh.’

CHAPTER XXVII.

SOME ACCOUNT OF THE TRIAL OF ANDREW LEBRUN.

I HAD a hundred questions to ask Mr. Blatherwick, but, bewildered with astonishment and overcome with shame and regret to think that I had mistrusted and wronged such a generous benefactor as David Leigh, I had not formulated one when the cab pulled up before the office of Messrs. Lawrence and Lawrence, and Mr. Blatherwick rose to spring out.

‘One moment, sir, I beg,’ said I, laying my hand on his arm.

‘Can’t wait,’ he replied. ‘Two hours’ work before me, and not an instant to spare.’

‘Two hours—I can wait. Will you do me the pleasure to dine with me?’ I asked, the plethoric habit and red face of the solicitor’s clerk suggesting the bribe.

‘Where?’ he asked, pausing on the footboard with a questioning look at me, my appearance probably conveying a very doubtful idea of my mode of living.

‘Where and when you like.’

‘Right. Be at the Holborn Restaurant—seven sharp.’

He had paid the cabman and hustled into the office before I was out of the cab.

Just before the hour for dining I got an evening paper with a notice of the trial. Necessarily it was brief, but a paragraph in the leaderettes commenting on it expressed sympathy with Andrew Lebrun, and recommended that a reprieve should be granted him by the Home Secretary immediately.

Mr. Blatherwick kept his appointment promptly, and we turned into the restaurant, where I did the thing handsomely, and to the obvious satisfaction of my companion. He would talk about nothing but dishes and wines while we were at table, but over the coffee, liqueurs, and a box of cigars he gave me all the particulars I desired with respect to the trial.

‘Lebrun’s appearance impressed everyone in his favour from the moment he was brought into court,’ said he. ‘I doubt if such a grand figure ever stood at that bar before. Erect, fearless, calm, not a bit of colour in his face, you know, and with that noble

head and thin silvery hair, he looked as if he had been cut out of marble, and by the hand of a master. At the first question put to him he said, "I have written a confession, telling how and why I shot Percival Somerset. I have nothing to retract from that statement, nothing to add. Do with me what you will." He stood there and listened with the same stoical indifference to the arguments of the prosecution against him and the arguments of the defence in his favour. He never opened his lips once except to repeat what he had said before, when he was questioned as to how he had first become acquainted with Somerset. There was no getting anything out of him beyond that confession of the shooting and the circumstances attending it. He heard the sentence looking the judge straight in the face, and when it was delivered he bowed his head with unshaken calm, as if he recognised the justice of the penalty. There, Mr. Grey, it was simply grand! It made me go cold down the back, I tell you. And that silence of the court was as if everyone was struck dumb with awe and pity. The first sound that broke it was the snivelling of some women in the gallery.'

I felt a thrill of pride at this description of my old master's fortitude, and the objects about me grew dim before my eyes; but I blew my nose to conceal this weakness from Mr. Blatherwick.

'I'm glad he stood it so well,' I faltered.

'The only thing that seemed to shake him at all was the evidence of Mr. David Leigh.'

‘Oh, he gave evidence?’

‘I should think he did. Ah! that’s the sort of witness we like to get in the box. Clear-headed, smart, saying just enough and no more than is necessary, in a sonorous, decisive tone, to be heard by all, convincing everyone of his honesty and uprightness, and setting the blessed jurymen nodding and winking at each other, with a settled opinion not to be shaken by any chop logic on the other side. No occasion to frighten him out of the way, Mr. Grey, eh?’

‘Well, there’s some merit in keeping out of the way when one’s not wanted, sir. What evidence did Mr. Leigh give?’

‘He came up after Mrs. Masson. Oh, oh! she was a treat!’ He leant back, wagging his head at some humorous recollection of Aunt Barbara in the witness-box. ‘She supplied just the little bit of comedy needful to put the jury in a good humour. Lor’, how we turned that poor old lady inside out, exposing all her meanness and vanity, and vulgarity and snobbishness. You should have heard us. Oh, oh! That’s just the sort of fun Milward, Q.C., likes. First of all, he’s considerate and amiable, flatters the witness, encourages her, eggs her on; then, when he’s got her well in hand, he gets playful, banters her, taps her on this side, taps her on that, perplexes her before she knows what he’s at, makes her contradict herself and get into all sorts of blunders. Then suddenly, like a cat that’s tired of playing with a mouse, he shows his teeth and the

whites of his eyes, thunders at her, frightens her into fits, and finally, with one last dab, he smashes her up completely. The other side is pretty good at that sort of thing,' he added reflectively, 'and they'd have served you that way if they had got hold of you, but luckily we didn't give 'em the chance.'

I drew a deep sigh of gratification at my happy escape, and Mr. Blatherwick continued :

'He didn't forget her in summing up, either. "Andrew Lebrun," said he, "will leave this court without a stain on his unblemished name, impressing us with the reverence we feel for such heroes as are glorified in the character of Virginius. But shall we ever look back upon this trial without a feeling of scorn and contempt for that woman, who is the real culprit in this case? Morally it is Mrs. Masson who should stand in the prisoner's dock to answer for this crime. And who would acquit her, even with the excuse of ignorance, cupidity, and silly vanity in her favour? By her own admission it was solely through her that this lost lady, Mrs. Somerset, was led to marry Mr. Somerset, in direct opposition to the wishes of her father. By her own admission it was she who forced Andrew Lebrun to believe that this marriage was consequent upon his own neglect. By her own admission it was she who, on the day of this tragic event, goaded the unhappy father to the point of madness by dilating on the terrible fate of his unhappy daughter Thérèse, and by prognosticating that Somerset, with his wealth and power,

would consummate the ruin of his second daughter. Daphne, as he had compassed the destruction of the first. I hold that she, and she alone, is responsible for the death of Percival Somerset and the martyrdom of Andrew Lebrun, and for these crimes she justly merits the execration which all men and women who can think and feel must accord her." The woman had to be carried out of the court, and serve her jolly well right !

'Yes, yes ; she has deserved her punishment. But you were going to tell me of the effect upon my master of Mr. Leigh's evidence.'

'Oh, ah ! Well, Lebrun turned his eyes with evident interest to the witness-box the moment David Leigh's name was called, and kept them fixed on him all the time he was there. The idea in his examination was to justify Lebrun by showing the utter rascality of Somerset. He explained that his first acquaintance with Somerset was made in a turf transaction, and that it continued for some months after Somerset's marriage. He admitted that he kept up this acquaintance from a profound interest in Mrs. Somerset and her sister, and the feelings of commiseration and friendship he felt for the sisters, perceiving Somerset's growing indifference to Thérèse and his villainous proposals to the younger sister. When the foreseen climax came, after Daphne had quitted Park Lane in shame and indignation at a proposal made by Somerset, and Mrs. Somerset, finding the indignities put upon her by her husband no longer sufferable,

abandoned her home, leaving everything she had received from her husband behind, Mr. Leigh had publicly denounced him at the Parthenon Club as a blackguard and a scoundrel, unfit for the society of gentlemen, and demanded that his name should be struck out of the list of members.

“Did you take any other steps to punish Somerset?” asked our counsel.

“Yes,” replied Mr. Leigh; “I sent two friends to offer Somerset reparation for the insult I had put upon him.”

“That is to say, you offered to cross the Channel and exchange shots with him?”

“Yes.”

“And if he had accepted your proposal you would have shot him?”

“Undoubtedly; and with no more compunction than was shown by the prisoner, though with less provocation.”

‘It seemed to me that this touched Lebrun a bit, but it was when Mr. Leigh was under cross-examination that he gave palpable signs of surprise and mental perturbation.’

Mr. Blatherwick produced a book of shorthand notes, and read some extracts from them.

“I believe, Mr. Leigh, that you have taken a very active part in the prisoner’s defence?”

“Yes.”

“As a matter of fact, you have supplied all the necessary funds?”

“Yes.”

““ You still take great interest in the welfare of these sisters ?”

““ Certainly.”

““ I believe you are engaged to be married to the younger Miss Lebrun ?”

‘ He thought he was going to nobble our witness,’ Mr. Blatherwick explained in parenthesis, looking up from his notes and closing one eye, ‘ by showing that his sole purpose in getting Lebrun acquitted was to escape the scandal of having a convict for a father-in-law. But you will see how he was done on that line.’

He looked again at his notes, and read :

““ You are quite mistaken,” replies Mr. Leigh.

“ I am under no engagement to Miss Lebrun, and I have never made her an offer of marriage.”

““ But you have made love to her, sir ?”

““ To my knowledge I have never said a word that could be construed into a declaration of love, or overstepped in any way the limits of sincere friendship.”

‘ I saw Lebrun’s hand drop by his side at this intimation.’

I was not surprised at this ; it took away my breath for the moment.

““ How is this, Mr. Leigh, when we have it from the last witness that you were daily at her house paying your addresses to Miss Lebrun ?”

““ I am not responsible for Mrs. Masson’s statements, nor for the construction she chooses to put upon my conduct.”

““ You were in constant communication with Miss Lebrun from the time you first made her acquaintance at Park Lane ?”

““ No; I did not see her for some weeks after she left her sister's house. Then I met her again at Mrs. Masson's house at Stamford Hill. After that there was a break, and I met her next at Lowestoft.”

““ Well, in the course of this interrupted communication, what did you find to talk about to this young lady ?”

““ As far as I can recollect, the most frequent theme of our private conversation was the fate of her sister, to whom Miss Lebrun was devotedly attached. Knowing her sister's position, she was intensely anxious on that unhappy lady's account. It relieved her to talk openly with one who shared her sympathy upon a subject which she was compelled to conceal from others. I was the only one who could encourage her to hope for a happy issue from the critical position of affairs at Park Lane.”

““ Oh, you believed it possible, then, that the difference between Mr. and Mrs. Somerset might be patched up ?”

‘These irrelevant matters,’ observed Mr. Blatherwick, glancing over his notes, ‘are the sort of stuff that occupies three-fourths of the time of the court.’

I begged him to continue, assuring him that his notes were of the greatest interest to me.

‘Well,’ said he, ‘as you're not likely to get 'em in

any report of the trial, I'll go to the end of the page just to show you how hard up the other side were for matter to spin out their case.

'Mr. Leigh: "I was firmly convinced that, if it was in the power of a good woman to lead a dissolute and faithless husband into a decent path of life by gentle art and noble self-sacrifice, Mrs. Somerset would in time reclaim the scoundrel she had married."

"You were not aware at the time that Mrs. Somerset had voluntarily left her husband?"

"Yes; I learnt the fact from a friend the day before I went to Lowestoft. But that did not shake my conviction; it only proved that Mr. Somerset had made it impossible for any woman with self-respect to remain under his roof."

"May I ask if there was any relation between the discovery of this separation and your subsequent visit to Lowestoft?"

"There was. I felt sure that Mrs. Somerset would not put the burden of her grief upon the shoulders of her father, but I thought it possible that she might seek her sister, to whom her trouble was already known."

"Then you went to Lowestoft rather with a view to finding Mrs. Somerset than Miss Lebrun?"

"I did."

"With what purpose?"

"With the purpose of rendering what assistance lay in my power, and of strengthening her in the resolution I felt sure she would take."

“What resolution was that?”

“The resolution to wait patiently until her husband became sensible of his loss by her absence, and for his own sake made her return possible by some show of repentance.”

“Did you talk to Miss Lebrun about this affair?”

“No; I did not feel justified in revealing a fact Mrs. Somerset, by her silence, evidently wished to conceal.”

“Of course, you have discussed the matter with her since the murder?”

“I have not seen Miss Lebrun since the day she left Lowestoft.”

“Then I am to understand that your interest was centred chiefly in the elder of the two sisters?”

“It was.”

“Now, sir, what is the date of your last interview with Mrs. Somerset?”

“I cannot give you the date, but it was the day before I denounced her husband at the Parthenon Club.”

“But you have communicated with her since?”

“I have never written one line to Mrs. Somerset, and I have not seen her from that day to this.”

‘That concluded the incident,’ said Mr. Blatherwick, putting up his book. ‘And when I looked up from my notes Andrew Lebrun was passing his long, thin fingers over his brow; then he clasped his hands gently on the bar before him, and bowed his head as if he wished to hear no more.’

I could imagine what thoughts were in my poor old master's mind at that moment.

'Have I killed my child for nothing?' he must have asked himself. 'Who knows? It may be better for that dear child to be dead than to know that the man she loved so passionately loved her not.'

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DAVID LEIGH DISCOVERS THE TRUTH.

I FOUND David Leigh waiting for me when I reached Clapham Common the next morning. I went up to him, stammering some sort of excuse for the injustice I had done him, and held out my hand, praying him to forgive me.

'Not a word of that, Grey,' said he, taking my hand and pressing it warmly. 'I should like you less if you had shown yourself less stanch in defending your friends. I have good news for you,' he continued, leading me away from the cottage to the seat by the footpath. 'Last night I saw the Home Secretary, through the introduction of a friend, and he virtually promised me that a reprieve shall be granted to Andrew Lebrun with the least delay possible.'

'God bless you, Mr. Leigh!'

'Have you settled what course to take with regard to telling Mrs. Somerset?'

I shook my head. The question had been in my mind all night, and was still unanswered.

‘She must learn the truth, but heaven knows how I am to tell her,’ said I.

‘Will you wait till the reprieve is granted?’

I made no reply. I was not thinking of Andrew Lebrun and his position, but of Daphne and the difficulty of concealing her fate.

‘It seems to me,’ he pursued, after waiting a minute for my response, and in a low, equable tone of persuasion, ‘that the fittest one to break this news to Mrs. Somerset is her sister Daphne. Women have more tact than we, and a sister must naturally know how to approach this subject in the least distressing manner.’

Still motionless, with my elbows on my knees—we were seated on the bench now—and my eyes fixed on the ground, I sat incapable of breaking silence.

‘You have told her all?’

There was another pause, and then he put a direct question, in a firmer tone :

‘John Grey, where is Daphne?’

‘I cannot tell you, sir,’ I answered in desperation, ‘I have not seen her since the day my master was arrested.’

‘But you know where she is—you have admitted that.’

‘I cannot tell you, sir,’ I repeated. ‘I cannot tell even her sister. That is my trouble. I am under a bond of secrecy. If ever you learn the truth it must be from the lips of her father.’

Mr. Leigh made no movement, no exclamation of

surprise. For some minutes I heard nothing but the throbbing of the blood in my temples. Then he spoke again :

‘Perhaps I know your secret. A solution of this mystery was suggested to my mind yesterday by an allusion of the counsel which struck me at first as being inapt. But as I looked at Andrew Lebrun it occurred to me that there might be much more in the comparison than he who made it dreamt of. He compared Lebrun with Virginius. Do you know the story?’

‘No, sir.’

‘Virginius killed his daughter to save her from dishonour.’

‘For heaven’s sake,’ I cried, springing to my feet, ‘ask me no more questions!’

‘Not one,’ he replied, with deep sympathy in his voice, as he rose and passed his arm through mine.

He led me still further from Myrtle Cottage, seeing my unfit condition to face Thérèse, and for some time we walked on, both silent, and he with profound sorrow in his face, knowing now that his conjecture was verified, and recalling doubtless the delightful image of Daphne, and, as I did, her sweetness and simplicity, with many instances of her quickly-changing moods, now grave, now gay, playful and earnest by turns, like a breeze that sways the big trees and then stops to whisk up the fallen leaves and play with them. One remembers the course of great events by a single incident, as one recalls to mind a vast panorama by some one par-

ticular jutting rock or gleam of distant water that impressed itself upon one's memory; and at this time I could think only of Daphne as she came into the shop one spring morning with a market bunch of wallflowers. I could see the joyous flush in her face, her little white nose, her hair blown from her white brow by the wind, her white teeth peeping through her red lips, parted in a smile, the colour of her delicate fingers contrasting against the reddish brown of the flowers, the pattern of her dress—yes, everything, as if she were standing now before me; ay, I even seemed to catch the scent of the flowers she held out to me for admiration.

‘How can I tell Thérèse? What can I say?’ I murmured despairingly.

‘Will you leave that to me, Grey?’ asked Mr. Leigh.

Nothing but kindness of heart and good feeling could have prompted him to make this offer, for surely the most unenviable office in life is to bear ill-tidings, and knowing this, I hesitated to accept his offer. But then, thinking of Thérèse rather than myself, I reflected that it would be better for her to hear the news from this friend, who had more delicacy and self-command a thousand times than I.

‘Sir,’ said I, ‘if you will take this duty off my hands I shall be most grateful, for you see how clumsy I am, how little control I have over my feelings, and how unfit I am to break the news gently to her.’

‘I shall see how she is. It may be better to wait

until her father's reprieve is assured before speaking of his trial. But I can prepare her for that by telling her that her husband is dead. You shall know how things are going as soon as I have anything to report. Where shall I find you ?'

I had made up my mind to return to Weaver Street now that the danger of being subpœnaed was past ; so I gave him that address, and we parted, shaking hands and looking straight in each other's eyes with mutual goodwill.

Every night I had visited the old house to see that the bolts were safe, the laboratory unopened—approaching the place with a feeling of sickness at my heart, hurrying away from it when my duty was done with a sense of relief—and so I felt no new emotion as I returned this morning, only a dull, stupid sensation, an aching depression of spirits, and utter absence of interest in my former occupation. I took down the shutters, set the clocks in movement, dusted the counters sluggishly, and with the same apathy sat down at my bench in the window and opened my tool drawer. An escapement of my own invention that had given me days and nights of delightful interest met my eye. I shoved it aside like a stale crust, and sat for an hour or more with my chin in my hands brooding, conscious of my folly, yet without energy to rouse myself and do a bit of drilling with the turns.

It was well for me when inquisitive neighbours dropped in ; I had to occupy myself then to escape them. I did not take the glass out of my eye when

they entered the shop, and my answers were curt, morose, and uncivil. And I was glad, too, when the time came to turn out and get my meals. But the thought of sleeping in the empty house, of going up those echoing stairs alone, and passing the still, stark, silent rooms, was dreadful.

After closing the shop I went out, and walked aimlessly about Shoreditch till the shops were all closed, and even the itinerant vendors of wheelks, with their flaming naphtha lamps, were gone.

It must have been past one when I let myself in and hurried with averted eyes past the laboratory and up to my room on the top floor. I shivered with cold terror, like a child, when the light was out.

Surely some presentiment possessed my mind of that which was to happen before another day dawned, and yet no definite conception intimated the impending revelation.

CHAPTER XXIX.

I ENTER THE LABORATORY ONCE MORE AND AM
FURTHER MYSTIFIED.

I FELL asleep, and was awoke by a violent ringing at the bell and a heavy thumping at the shop-door. Starting up in bed, I rubbed my eyes, for it was still dark, doubting whether the clamour was real or the vivid impression of a dream, when the bell again rang in loud, quick-succeeding jerks, and a renewed thumping at the shutters and door drove an echoing

discord through the house that put a speedy end to doubt.

I sprang from the bed and threw up the window-sash. A policeman was below, hammering the door now with his truncheon.

‘What is it?’ I cried.

‘Fire at the back. Come down,’ he shouted in reply, and then, going to the next house, raised the alarm there.

Windows were being thrown up over the way. A couple of men passed the end of the street, running towards Brick Lane, and yelling ‘Fire!’ as they ran. Dreading I know not what, for the idea of personal danger was not in my mind, I groped my way through the passage and into the back-room, and lifted the window-sash.

A volume of thick smoke blew down upon me, pungent and acrid, catching my throat and making my eyes smart. Dimly through the cloud I perceived the outline of a timber-stack defined against a ruddy glow that flickered and vibrated as the smoke rolled out in thickening volume. Suddenly a great jagged sheet of flame leapt up, curled and twisted in the dense smoke, and died out. Another and another mass of flame was belched up; then a great red tongue crept out and licked round the stacks, and something falling with a dull thud, a spire of whirling sparks shot up into the sky, followed by a huge mass of flame, that roared and spit and crackled as it rose.

The long shed where the planks are stood on end

to season was on fire, and before long the whole yard, with its high stacks of timber, must go.

After the first momentary survey I turned my eyes downwards, striving to discern the laboratory through the smoke by the light of the blazing timber. Ah! that was the object of my undefined fears. What if the fire spread to that? With this question in my mind, I returned to my room. The way was light enough now. I could see my clothes lying on the chair even in the front-room by the reflected glow from the overhanging clouds. A furious eagerness to get downstairs possessed me now, shaking my limbs and impeding my efforts to dress quickly. And all the time I fumbled in this tedious process—as it seemed to me, though in reality I could not have been five minutes occupied in dressing—the noises outside reaching my ear added to my frantic impatience. Now the clink of the waterman's keys as he turned on the fire-plug, then a rush, as the water burst up from the main, came through the hoarse cries of the men rushing down the street to get a nearer view of the fire, now roaring and crackling continuously. Then the rattle of wheels and the hoofs of galloping horses, mingled with the strident shouts of firemen and the jingling of the little bells on the horses' harness was, cut by the shrill scream of a steam-whistle. The engine passed the end of the street, the sounds faded away, to be repeated by another rattling of wheels and fresh cries as a second engine ran down Weaver Street.

As I stumbled down the stairs it sounded odd to hear the quiet, regular ticking of the clocks in contrast with the hubbub of discordant and spasmodic sounds without. I stepped in a puddle of water as I went behind the counter to light the gas; it was trickling under the door and streaming right across the shop.

‘Now what shall I do?’ I asked myself, as the gas threw a bright light about me; for my desperate haste had as yet no definite object.

Another steamer had come screaming and tearing down the street, pulling up at the door. I heard the clank of the harness, the hissing of steam, the rattle of paraphernalia, men leaping down upon the wet pavement, mingled voices in short sharp utterance, and then a thundering bang at the door that startled me like a blow in one’s sleep. A fireman, the brass upon his helmet gleaming in the light, brushed past me as I opened the door.

‘Where’s your back door?’ he asked, going towards the laboratory.

‘Not there!’ I cried hurriedly. ‘Further on, at the side there.’

He went out into the garden, and returning in a couple of minutes, said, as he hurried through the shop:

‘You’ve got a window open. Shut it.’

And then, going into the street, he called to his men to bring in the hose.

I ran upstairs to shut the window I had opened in the back-room. It was high time; the sparks were

drifting in, a flake of burning wood as large as the palm of my hand lay on the floor, and the carpet was already smouldering. With difficulty I made my way to the window and closed it, for the smoke was suffocating; but, despite the dense volumes rolling towards me, I could see the flames in the timber-stacks wreathing upwards in a great whirling mass. It was terrific!

I stamped out the smouldering embers on the carpet—twice having to leave the spot to get breath—and then descended to the shop, my thoughts still occupied with a terrible anxiety for the safety of the laboratory.

The hose was laid through the shop now. Outside the engine was at work. ‘Bang, ping! bang, ping! bang, ping!’ it sounded. The water was squirting in a jet over the counter from a leak in the hose. They were taking the horses away from another engine that had drawn up before the house, and a second hose was being laid through the shop. Every moment firemen were coming in and out from the garden and the street, some dripping with water and their faces already black with smoke. From one side came the roaring and crackling and spitting sounds of the fire, with now and then a dull crash; from the other the shrieking of steam-whistles, the bellowing of the mob beaten back by the police, and the ceaseless ‘bang, ping! bang, ping! bang, ping!’ of the engines. And in the midst of this tumult and bewildering confusion, the captain, coming from the back, quietly wrote a note on a slip of paper, using

my show-case for a desk, and sent it off by a man, giving his instructions as calmly as I might tell a boy to take a duster and clean the windows.

Looking round the shop, he caught sight of me, shivering with fear against the door of the laboratory.

‘Better get your valuables together,’ he observed.

‘Do—do—do you think the house will catch, sir?’ I stammered.

‘All depends on the wind. You’ll be roasted, anyhow, if you’re not burnt. Ah! what’s in this outhouse?’ he asked, coming to my side and giving the door a kick.

‘Nothing, sir, nothing.’

‘Nothing!’ he echoed, in a tone of incredulity.

‘What’s it used for?’

‘Only a laboratory, sir.’

‘You call that nothing! There’s pretty sure to be combustibles in a laboratory. I’ll have a look. Where’s the key?’

‘No, sir, I assure you there are no combustibles,’ I replied, quaking with dread lest he should insist upon entering, and find there the dead body of Daphne. ‘There’s nothing but some instruments of my master’s—nothing.’

‘Where’s your master?’

‘Mr. Lebrun, sir? He’s—he’s not at home.’

‘Lebrun! Why, is that the old gentleman who was tried yesterday for shooting Mr. Somerset?’

‘Yes.’

‘Is it, though? Poor old chap! He lived here, did he?’

I was only too eager to divert his thoughts from the laboratory, and I told him what a good friend Andrew Lebrun had been to me, and he listened with interest till a man came to ask a question about pulling down some loose timber in the adjoining yard, when he left me abruptly.

I had averted the peril of discovery for the moment, but what if he returned and persisted in seeing the contents of the laboratory? It would be useless to say that I had not the keys, for at a word from him his men would burst the doors open in a minute or two. And then if the body were found there an inquiry must follow, revealing the truth and making reprieve for Andrew Lebrun impossible. No, that must not be. It was my duty now to break the promise I had given my master, and, horrible as the task might be, I must find some new hiding-place for the dead body before the firemen broke through the doors that hid it. I felt that for the sake of Thérèse and my old master I must overcome my sickening repugnance and do this thing.

Some men were carrying a ladder through the shop. When they reached the passage, blocking entrance from the garden for that moment, I glanced round me. I was quite alone; now was the moment for action. I got the key in my hand, steadied my nerves by an effort, then opened the laboratory door, entered the short passage, and closed the door behind me. I stood now between the two doors, irresolute for a moment. It needed more courage to open that second door and face the unknown.

The horrible idea of corruption entered my head, and imagination figured in the darkness the sweet face of my dear little mistress bloated and discoloured beyond recognition.

To yield to these hideous fancies was to lose the small remnant of courage I possessed—to lose my senses altogether. In desperation I thrust the key in the second lock and, my hair bristling on my head, pushed back the inner door.

It was quite light. From three sides the glow from the roaring fire without streamed through the glazed casements under the leaded roof. Every corner of the long chamber was illuminated. I know not why, but I expected to see something lying on the ground in the middle covered with a sheet, and I was stupefied for a moment to find nothing there. Then, standing still on the threshold, I turned my eyes to the three corners within my range of vision. Nothing! Was it huddled up in the fourth corner behind the door—that dreadful thing I sought yet dreaded to find? I stepped forward, closing the door and casting my eyes behind it. With a sense of wild relief I perceived that the fourth corner was empty like the others.

Yet it must be here in some part. The body could not have vanished into thin air. Where was it hidden? To all appearances the laboratory was exactly in the condition it had presented the first day I entered it. There were the shelves running round the three sides, with their glass retorts and queer-looking instruments and vessels, the bench at

the end with its drawers beneath, and a big carboy standing at one end, the brazier under the hood of the chimney—all just as they were. The only new thing was the lamp I had bought at my master's request, standing now on a tripod beside the carboy. But presently I observed a pump in the further corner, between the end of the bench and the wall, which I had not noticed before.

‘There must be a well under the pump,’ thought I. ‘Is she down there?’

But when, dropping on my knees, I passed my hand over the surface, I could feel no irregularities. The stone slab in which the pump was set formed a perfect level with the rest of the pavement. The cement at the edge was hard as iron. I could not force my nail into it.

I went over the floor from end to end, feeling the stones and the cement between them carefully. There was no sign of their having been raised. Besides, there were no implements for excavating, no material for relaying the stones. To form a grave for even so slight a body as little Daphne's some earth must have been removed, but there was none to be seen, no place where it could be hidden.

‘No, it isn't here,’ I said to myself, standing in the middle of the laboratory and turning my eyes slowly from one point to another in bewilderment.

Then, my spirits wonderfully lightened by that uncertainty which permits the existence of hope, I paused beside the bench, and set myself to find

some explanation, if it were possible, of that which seemed so inexplicable.

‘Surely,’ I argued, ‘Andrew Lebrun was master of some secret concerning life unknown to others, and therefore as impossible for others to imagine as a fourth dimension of space. And if, by reason of that occult art, he had the power to create from nothing a blade of wheat, a pigeon, a Percival Somerset, he could resolve a being into the state of non-existence.’

Logical as the argument was, it failed to convince me—nay, it seemed absurd; as if it were more incredible that a tangible substance should be dissolved into nothing than that a palpable something should be evolved from it. And logical as the theory might be, there was this inconsistency to account for—if Andrew Lebrun had spirited away his daughter, why should he lay such stringent injunctions upon me to guard the laboratory and suffer no one to enter it? ‘If the body is not here, what had he to fear from an investigation of the place?’ I asked myself. With this question on my mind I looked again, for the hundredth time, around me. And once more the well under the pump suggested an idea less difficult to accept than any supernatural theory.

The half-dead pigeon was wet when my master brought it out, I reflected. Percival Somerset must have been in the same condition, judging by the fact that he needed a suit of my clothes, and carried a waistcoat on his arm that was clearly soaked with water. To produce terrestrial beings alive out of

water enclosed for a hundred years is not less absurd to suppose than their production from air, but what if in the well there were some subterranean passage communicating with the outer world ?

I went upon my knees again, and lighting a vesta, examined the stone and the surrounding pavement carefully, and as a result rose with the firm conviction that anything would be easier to believe than that those stones had been raised and relaid within a few weeks by the hand of Andrew Lebrun.

CHAPTER XXX.

THÉRÈSE COMES HOME.

THE light glowed more intensely through the case-ments ; the pungent smoke blowing down the chimney, though it was but a pipe of a few inches in diameter, made respiration difficult ; glass fell upon the lead roof overhead, showing that the flames had reached the windows of the house ; then a torrent of water fell with a thud overhead, followed by a continued downpour as the firemen turned their hose upon the house to save it from demolition. And yet, hearing these menacing sounds, I stood there almost unmoved, for this fire and all the forces of nature seemed to sink into insignificance by contrast with the supernatural mystery that faced me and bewildered my senses.

After awhile the torrent ceased to fall upon the

roof, and the glow began to fluctuate, bursting up vividly now and then, to subside again quickly to a duller brownish-red. And thus it continued to alternate for some time, until at times the darkness was almost complete, and I could only make out the surrounding objects in the laboratory vaguely. Then, as my overstrained nerves relaxed, fear of some superhuman presence seized me. At one moment I fancied Mr. Somerset was rising from the ground; in the next a flickering shadow represented a body struggling to throw off a winding-sheet—the body of Daphne, invisible in the fuller light; creatures of the other world only to be seen under extraordinary conditions. What was I to believe? Were not my own craven fears as worthy of credence as the impossibilities forced upon me?

I crept to the door and went out, closing it after me quickly, as if to shut off the pursuit of these terrible phantoms. Then, taking advantage of a momentary silence in the shop, I issued from the narrow passage and locked the second door behind me. No one had seen me. The shop was empty. A thick vapour clung to everything; here and there the condensed steam trickled down the walls in shining streaks. The water still spurted over the counter. The faces of the clocks against the wall, still ticking as if nothing had happened, were black and grimy. A sloppy, gritty mud of charred wood and earth from the garden flooded the shop floor, and outside the engines were still at their endless work—‘bang, ping! bang, ping! bang, ping!’

About eleven o'clock the next morning David Leigh came to see me, and a most deplorable object he must have thought me, for I was utterly tired out and dispirited, and as grimy as a tinker, not having found enough energy to wash my face or attempt to make any part of the house habitable. Hose still lay across the shop, and there was not a dry standing-place anywhere.

'You've had a bad time of it, Grey; but you're all right—that's some comfort,' said he cheerfully.

'Not much,' I replied gloomily. 'It's almost a pity the place wasn't burnt up with the rest. If one believed in that sort of thing, you would say the house is cursed. We've had nothing but ill-luck in it. Just come up and see the state of things.'

I took him upstairs and showed him the back windows all broken, the sashes and woodwork charred, the rooms drenched, furniture knocked about, gritty embers scrunching under the foot at every step, and an acrid steam from the still smouldering timber-yard filling every part of the house like a fog.

'What's to be done? Where's one to begin first in a mess like this?' I said despondingly.

'What do you say to clearing out of it altogether, Grey?'

'No, sir. I promised Andrew Lebrun I'd stick to the place till he came back, and I will.'

'Well, what can I do to help you?'

'Leave me alone for a few days. That's the kindest thing you can do. I shall pull through as

soon as I shake off this depression, and when I once begin to work it'll be all right.'

'I shan't leave you till your depression is shaken off, anyhow, and as a preliminary we'll have lunch together. No good shaking your head. You must let me have my way now if you wish me to let you have yours after. Off with that coat, man.'

He took me into the City, where we lunched together, and certainly I felt quite another man after it, for not only were my physical forces restored by the excellent repast, but my mind was invigorated by contact with one whose moral courage seemed to forbid despair.

He walked back with me as far as Spitalfields Church, talking chiefly of Thérèse, whom he had seen the day before. He had told her of her husband's death, but had refrained from breaking the graver news, in consideration of her enfeebled condition.

'It will be time enough when the reprieve is granted,' said he. 'The good news will qualify the bad to some degree.' Then, after a pause, he observed: 'She has endured so much that she will bear this fresh trial with fortitude, I have no doubt. She is such a brave, good woman. And then, whatever her sister's fate may be, we can encourage her to hope.'

'For what?' I asked.

'First for her father's release. It isn't sufficient that he shall be reprieved. We must obtain his release—his speedy release.'

‘Is that possible?’

‘It should be, quite. Had he pleaded not guilty to the charge of wilful murder he would undoubtedly have been acquitted and released at once. It would be anomalous to punish him for taking a more heroic and straightforward course. Oh, that can be arranged, I believe. And if you maintain that Daphne’s fate can only be learnt from his lips——’

He glanced at me interrogatively.

‘I do maintain it—and with more reason now than ever,’ I said.

‘Then when we next meet,’ said he, giving me his hand in parting—‘when we next meet it will be under happier circumstances, Grey, I believe.’

Impressed by his tone of conviction, I returned to Weaver Street, bristling, as it were, with energy and the determination to make the best of everything.

The hose was just being dragged out of the shop, and now, having the house to myself, I quickly got into my working clothes and set about clearing up. And here was enough in all conscience to keep my mind from stagnating. For three days I worked like a nigger—and looked like one, I’ll be bound—and with the help of a couple of charwomen did somehow manage to get the house and shop into order and fairly clean and dry.

And on Saturday afternoon, when I sat down to my bench in a clean white apron, and not a smut anywhere, I said to myself:

‘Now I shouldn’t mind if Mr. Leigh dropped in to

see me, especially if he has any good news to tell me.'

Well, as if it were to be, the words were scarcely formed in my mind when the shop bell rang, and cocking my eye up—with my glass in the other—who should I see holding the door open but the gentleman I was thinking of.

And as he stood thus, a delicate, pale lady, dressed in black, passed him and came towards me with her hand out.

'Thérèse! Why, madame!' I exclaimed, after the first glance of uncertainty, for she looked so pale and thin, and I had never before seen her in black.

'I've come back to the old home, John,' she said simply.

'Just to see what a pickle I'm in. Ah, Mr. Leigh has told you. But happily I've got the place a bit straight, so I shan't feel quite so low-spirited as when you saw it last, sir. Nevertheless, you will be glad to go back to Clapham again as soon as possible, I dare say,' I added, addressing Thérèse.

'No; I've come to stay, John,' said she in her old quiet, decisive manner. 'I must be here when father comes back, and he will be back before long.'

CHAPTER XXXI.

I HAVE REASON TO LIKE DAVID LEIGH MORE THAN
EVER.

‘WHY, to judge by your face, John,’ said Thérèse, smiling at my look of consternation, ‘one would almost think you were sorry to see me back.’

‘Ah! you know better than that,’ I exclaimed. ‘But, indeed, the thought of your staying here dismays me.’

‘Because you still look upon me as a fine lady. But if you think, John, that I am only a poor homeless little widow——’

‘But—but Jane’s gone, and I sent away the charwoman this morning.’

‘We will have the charwoman back till Jane returns.’

‘And there’s no bread—not a scrap of food in the house.’

‘One of us must go out and buy some.’

‘And there’s not a fire alight. The rooms are comfortless.’

‘We will light fires. Comfortless,’ she said, laying her gloved hand on my arm with compassion in her voice and gesture; ‘I know it. Are not all these arguments a proof that I am needed to give comfort to someone?’

Mr. Leigh, standing a little on one side with his hands behind him, regarded her with silent admira-

tion. I fancy he must have told her of the miserable plight he had found me in, and for that reason she had hastened to return. I was more sure of this later on, when she admitted that, although the reprieve had been granted to her father, it might be that weeks would elapse before he was set at liberty, even with all the influence that Mr. Leigh and his friends could bring to bear in his favour.

‘Come, let us make a beginning,’ said she, leading the way upstairs.

I followed with Mr. Leigh, explaining on the way that, although I had got the back rooms straight, the paint on the new window-sashes still smelt strong, but that the rooms in the front of the house were all right.

It happened that the first door she opened was that of the front sitting-room, and this I had not dared to touch. It still remained as it was the night that Daphne was carried from it lifeless. She went up to the table, and laying her hands upon the scraps of unfinished work Daphne had laid there, she bowed her head over them in silence, as if stricken with grief. Her black dress, though it was ungarnished with crape, and might have been chosen on going to Mrs. Watson’s as the most suitable for her position in that house, had a peculiar significance for me in conjunction with her silent sorrow. I said to myself, ‘She knows all.’ And she seemed to understand why I had left the room untouched, for, after turning away from us to wipe away the tears from her eyes, she said to me in a broken voice:

‘It was here you saw her last, John?’

‘Yes, yes. I have not seen her since that night. I know nothing—nothing,’ I hurried to explain.

‘Mr. Leigh has told me—I know,’ she replied.

Then, smiling at me faintly through her tears, and pressing the hand I instinctively offered, she broke away, and ran upstairs in silence.

Mr. Leigh led me from the room and closed the door.

‘The blow must have fallen sooner or later. Best to get it over at once,’ he said in a low voice; and then, going into the kitchen, which was as bright and clean as hands could make it, he remarked in a cheerful tone:

‘This is a nice cheerful sort of a room. How about getting tea, Grey? Tea’s as great a comfort to a woman as a pipe is to a man.’

‘Yes; I’ll go out and get what is necessary as soon as I’ve lit the fire and popped on the kettle.’

‘Leave that to me,’ he replied gravely, tucking up his cuffs. ‘I think I’m equal to lighting a fire and popping on a kettle. The great thing is to have plenty of wood.’

‘There are two whole ha’penny bundles in that dresser cupboard.’

‘Two—that’s something to begin with. Bring in half-a-dozen more with you, old man.’

‘Well,’ thought I, ‘it’s as well I had the chimney swept, or there might be another fire down Weaver Street before long.’

I left him systematically arranging the wood in

the grate—the elaborate structure had reached the level of the top bar before I went—and nothing could be more comic than to see this faultlessly-attired gentleman gravely employing himself in this domestic office, nor more pleasing—to my mind—when one considers the kindly, helpful spirit that prompted him. When I returned the fire was half-way up the chimney, and he was protesting against Thérèse, now with her skirt tucked up and a house-maid's apron on, spoiling his work by putting coal on. But she had her own way (to my great satisfaction), laughing at his ignorance in such matters (for it seems he had 'popped' the kettle on without a drop of water in it), with the result that we had a magnificent fire and the kettle singing and steaming a good bit before the tea-things were laid. Then he insisted on toasting the crumpets—which he called muffins—I had brought in, while Thérèse and I put the butter in a dish and busied ourselves with like matters.

And at last we sat down to tea in the half-light, with the glow of the fire reflected on the shining tea-things, and one would have said that a happier party did not exist.

It seems to me that all lovable men retain to the end of life something of their boyish nature, and surely no lad playing at Robinson Crusoe could have shown more pleasure than Mr. Leigh in his new experience of domestic economy. He could not leave the fire alone. He was proud of his nicely-browned crumpets, and I believe had there been more he

would have eaten all there were on the plate for the fun of toasting others.

As for me, after the solitary, miserable, and lugubrious life I had led during the past month, the companionship alone of two such pleasant people was a real delight, but to look at Thérèse, with all the signs of returning health and beauty in her sweet face, filled me with a joy which I cannot express. And she was happy also, as women are who feel that they are making others happy.

‘Ah! if we could only go on thus!’ I said to myself, and that not despondingly, but with a belief that our great troubles were past, and a new life opening before us.

There was much to do after tea. I went out and persuaded the charwoman, a most respectable and good old woman, to come in the house and stay till Jane returned from her home in Essex; and while I was engaged in this arrangement Thérèse and Mr. Leigh went out and bought provisions for supper, Mr. Leigh coming back with his pockets bulging and his arms full, and extremely satisfied with the purchase he had made of a large York ham, with a view to ham and eggs for supper—a ham that we did not see the last of till the knuckle end was handed over to the dustman as no longer fit for human food. He stayed quite late, and was then so loath to leave us that he was quite ten minutes at the shop-door saying ‘Good-night’ before he finally went.

And now the good old times appeared to have returned, for punctually at eight the next morning

Mrs. Grigg (the charwoman) came down to tell me breakfast was ready, and there was Thérèse, quite bright and cheerful, at the breakfast-table to greet me in the old way. She had been up some time, and with her clear common-sense and direct purpose of making the best of existing conditions, had done what was possible to efface the memory of irrevocable misfortunes, as I saw in passing the open door of the sitting-room. The windows were open to admit the morning sunlight, the furniture was arranged in its normal position, the remnants of Daphne's work were put away, and a fire burnt cheerfully in the grate.

In the breakfast-room the table looked so fresh and clean, the food so appetizing, that I could not refrain from rubbing my hands with an expression of delight as I sat down.

“O Solitude, where are the charms that sages have seen in thy face?” I murmured.

‘Poor John!’ said Thérèse, in a low, sweet tone of sympathy.

But that was the only allusion we made to the past. No; we felt that it was wiser and better to look forward and onward.

I could find something to say about every hour of these happier days, but at that rate I should never finish this history or achieve its purpose. My business is to tell of those events which justified the act of Andrew Lebrun and their attendant circumstances, and practically for some weeks our life in Weaver Street was eventless.

Thérèse was not solitary. Some old friends—the Groves and a very nice family of the name of Davis—who had shown their good taste by keeping away at the time when I was plagued by the inquiries of merely inquisitive neighbours, now renewed their acquaintance with her, and showed their sympathy by a hundred delicate, unobtrusive acts of kindness. Twice a week Mrs. Watson came, with her cap in a little box, to spend the day in Weaver Street, and David Leigh was with us so frequently that I ceased to regard him as a visitor. He treated me as a friend and on terms of equality. That was only natural to one who had the essential qualities of a gentleman; for it is only an underbred and mean person who suffers an assertion of superiority to escape him, even in cases where the difference in rank and condition is unmistakable. He made no secret of his devotion to Thérèse, and though he maintained too firm a hold upon his inclinations to betray his warmer feeling further, it was clear that he loved her sincerely and with his whole heart. In his most confidential moments with me he never referred to his acquaintance with Thérèse during her husband's lifetime; but I had heard enough from Mr. Blatherwick to know that his passion dated from that time, and I was convinced that he had ceased to frequent the society in which she mixed—after his rupture with Somerset—from an honourable regard to her welfare, and with a view to giving her husband no pretext for slighting her. But an incident occurred which added yet another proof

of the purity of his feelings and his disinterestedness.

One day a gentleman called to see Thérèse, and while their interview was proceeding it happened that David Leigh dropped in. He stayed in the shop with me, talking about my famous escapement, in which he took a great deal of interest, until Jane, having shown the gentleman out, told us that tea was ready. We went upstairs, and, finding that Thérèse was not in the breakfast-room, we opened the door and discovered her in the sitting-room, seated in her favourite attitude when she had some serious subject to consider, her hands clasped at the back of her head, her eyes looking fixedly upwards from under their beautifully-marked brows, and her body thrown backwards in the chair.

‘You have caught me in a brown study!’ she exclaimed, rising quickly, with a pretty confusion in her face, as she gave her hand to David. ‘I have had a visitor. Sit down,’ she added, closing the door. ‘I want to tell you all about it.’

Then she told us that, her husband having died intestate, one-half of his estate reverted to her, and that this fortune, making all deductions for debts, etc., amounted to nearly three hundred thousand pounds.

‘Three hundred thousand pounds!’ I exclaimed joyfully. ‘Why, my gracious me, it is enormous!’

‘Yes,’ said David Leigh quietly, ‘one could do a good deal with that.’

‘But the question is, what could one do with it?’ she said, smiling.

‘Why, if you sunk it in Consols,’ said I, ‘it would give you a yearly income of—let me see, three thousand by two and a half—over seven thousand a year. Good heavens! you may live like a princess for that.’

‘Is that your opinion too?’ she asked, turning to David Leigh.

‘Oh, my opinion is that you may live like something better than the ordinary run of princesses without touching a penny of that money.’

‘Ah! that is my hope also,’ she replied, rising and giving her hand impulsively to David, and with something majestic in her air, as if that hope were already realized.

CHAPTER XXXII.

AN ACCIDENT REVEALS THE SECRET OF NICOLAS VAN DER HOËL TO ME.

I MUST say that it seemed to me Thérèse was pushing sentiment to a quixotic degree to reject a quarter of a million of money merely because it had belonged to a man of despicable character.

‘On this principle,’ thought I, ‘if we examined how every penny was made that is offered us, three-fourths of the world would be penniless.’

And I ventured to remonstrate with her when we were alone.

She listened to my argument with patient atten-

tion, but when I came to the end she laid her work in her lap, and drawing her head up with dignity, her lip quivering a little with passion, she answered :

‘ I should employ that money for my own use with the same loathing that I might put on the discarded clothing of a leper. If I were in the utmost need I think I should refuse that money.’

‘ But if it came to you by right——’

‘ By what right ?’ she asked quickly. ‘ Virtually I renounced all my rights as that man’s wife the day I took off my wedding-ring and left his house.’

‘ Still, it seems a dreadful pity to throw away such a sum. Even if you renounced it for your own use, think of the good you might do by bestowing it on others.’

‘ Ah ! that is another matter. Do you know what will become of it if I refuse it ?’

‘ I suppose it will go to the State. Indirectly, of course, that will benefit others, by lightening taxation on the mass to some infinitesimal degree, but it is nothing more than a drop in the ocean.’

‘ It is pleasant to think of helping the poor more directly—by giving the money to the hospitals, for example. We might talk to Mr. Leigh about that before I make a final decision.’ Then, after taking a few stitches in silence, she said, ‘ I am sure I am right, John, to refuse it for myself, because that is our friend’s feeling in the matter.’

There was no arguing beyond that. ‘ Our friend ’ was taking the place of a supreme arbiter in all that concerned the happiness of Thérèse.

It really seemed as if the Fates were against our living peaceably in Weaver Street. After the fire the local inspectors had visited the house, tapped the walls, consulted together, and left me with a satisfied nod. Thanks to the intervening space made by the garden, we had not suffered so much as our neighbours. The house on the left was especially in a bad way, and had to be shored up forthwith. Soon after this an ugly crack appeared in the back wall of the house on the right, owing to the sinking of the foundation under the deluge of water poured upon it. And now a second party of inspectors called and made a more exhaustive examination of our premises. They wanted to poke into the laboratory, but I, being rather nettled by the hectoring tone in which they made their demand, replied somewhat cavalierly that they could not have the keys, that the premises had already been examined and passed by other inspectors, and that the stability of the house could not possibly be affected by the condition of an outbuilding.

‘We are not accustomed to take our instructions from shopmen,’ retorted a peppery little gentleman, with a fiery face. ‘If it were necessary in our opinion to examine Spitalfields Church to decide whether your building is safe or not, we should do so. As it happens, the condition of your outbuilding is perfectly immaterial, for you’ll have to come down. Your party walls’—tapping the wainscot, which had nothing to do with the party walls—‘are defective, your chimneys are constructed contrary

to the regulations of the Board of Works, and your ground-floor is four inches and a half below the level of the pavement. You must come down, young man.'

'What!' I exclaimed indignantly; 'and we've just had new sashes put in the back windows.'

'Your new sashes will be more appropriate in a new house. Good-morning.'

And with that they walked out of the shop, all as stiff as ramrods.

I thought this was only a threat, for the house was perfectly sound from basement to roof, and would certainly have been passed had I had only the common-sense to offer the party a glass of wine and a biscuit instead of my opinions; but, surely enough, before the end of the week we were served with a formal notice instructing us to commence the demolition of our premises before the expiration of one calendar month.

'A month,' said Thérèse, when I showed her the letter. 'Oh, father will be with us before then.'

In conformity with prison regulations, we had not yet been permitted to communicate with Andrew Lebrun; but I had a feeling that before the laboratory was pulled down an effort must be made to let him know, in case any provision was to be made in connection with his mysterious secret. As I shall show presently, he learnt the news by unexpected means, and far sooner than I anticipated.

One Sunday morning David Leigh called early to take Thérèse to church, and as soon as they left the

house the thought of the approaching demolition, which haunted my mind like a fatal menace, prompted me to go into the laboratory and examine it by the light of day.

‘It won’t do,’ thought I, ‘to depend too fully on the release of Andrew Lebrun within the month, and before the time expires I must settle what is to be done with respect to removing the contents of the laboratory to some other place.’

There was nothing terrifying or even uncanny in the aspect of the place by the gray light of day. It only seemed very still and silent as I stood in the middle looking round me. I saw nothing which I had not seen before. There was certainly not much to move—a couple of cartloads at the outside, I reckoned. The bench at the end was the most cumbersome article. Approaching it to see how it was fixed to the wall, I saw that the parchment left by Nicolas Van der Hoël had been pinned on the bench by Andrew Lebrun in exactly the same place where we had found it on first entering the laboratory. Bending over the bench, I tried to get the sense of the writing upon the open page, but there was only one word which I could understand. ‘Aqua’—which I knew meant water—appeared three times on the page. There were other well-remembered facts besides the repetition of this word to prove that some connection existed between water and the secret of this laboratory.

Perplexed, I turned my eyes to the pump in the corner, and, like other ignorant persons in the

presence of things they do not fully comprehend, I felt I must touch it and see if it worked. After three or four strokes of the handle the water flowed freely enough from the spout, showing that it had been employed recently, for after the disuse of a century the sucker would certainly have dried in the barrel and become useless. Yet, I reflected, there was water here when my master brought Percival Somerset into existence, and at that time my master had not put the pump in repair. The contradictions that faced me at all points when I sought an explanation of the mystery really seemed to madden me, and I turned away as if there were danger in pressing this insoluble problem further. But it pursued me.

‘After all,’ thought I, ‘there might have been water in some hermetically-closed vessel.’

There stood the big carboy beside the bench—a vessel capable of containing four or five gallons. But that appeared to be still sealed. Inspecting it more closely, I came to the conclusion that the wax was new; and lighting a vesta, I found in it a convincing proof that it had been sealed by Andrew Lebrun—the impression of a Victorian penny.

Here was at least one discovery. Was it a clue?

What other vessels were there? Casting my glance round the shelves, I saw many odd jars and phials, but one white jar stood out from the rest, and seemed familiar to me. I took it down. It was a marmalade jar that I had seen in the kitchen. It was full of something which seemed to have solidified

from a molten condition in the jar itself, for it looked a-piece with the earthenware—a semi-opaque, vitreous-looking substance, that neither yielded under the finger nor scraped under the nail. It felt like glass. It might have been glass for all I then knew to the contrary.

What else was there on the shelf? A corked medicine-bottle half-filled with a transparent fluid attracted my attention by its modern appearance. I stretched out my hand to take it down. At that moment someone—a boy probably—passing the shop-front rattled a stick against the shutters, breaking the silence with such a sharp din, that I started involuntarily, knocking over the bottle. It rolled over the edge of the shelf, and fell with a smart crack on the side of the jar I held in the other hand, knocking off the neck of the bottle, and spilling a portion of the liquid upon the vitreous substance in the jar.

Immediately a curious phenomenon presented itself. A thin vapour wreathed up from the mouth of the jar, and the liquid began to seethe and bubble by the rapidity of the chemical combination. The process continued, and I watched it with intense interest, believing that the liquid was dissolving the glassy matter. To assure myself of this fact, I dipped my finger in, and found that in the few seconds that had elapsed one half the contents of the jar had been transformed from a perfectly compact and hard substance to a limpid fluid, quite warm with the briskness of the action set up.

In less than two minutes the bubbling ceased entirely, and looking down through the still, transparent liquid, I could see a beetle at the bottom.

I fished the little creature out, and holding it on the extended palm of my hand, I blew gently upon it to dry the liquid that clung to its body, watching it with an intense interest, feeling that I needed but one sign to know that I also had discovered the great secret of Nicolas Van der Hoël. And presently that sign was given. With awe I perceived that the beetle, which must have been cemented in the vitreous substance for at least a month, was alive. Its antennæ moved!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

I FIND DAPHNE'S HIDING-PLACE.

THE beetle lived! Before this fact the theories of supernatural influences, the superhuman powers I had been forced to attribute to Nicolas Van der Hoël and his disciple, Andrew Lebrun, to explain the existence of Percival Somerset and the disappearance of Daphne, fell to the ground like the ridiculous assumptions with which the ignorant in all ages have sought to account for natural phenomena before science revealed the grand and simple laws of universal forces. Arrested animation—those two words cleared away at a breath the impenetrable fog in which I had been groping so long.

I recalled to mind now many things that Andrew Lebrun had told me in the past, in support of his long-standing belief that the human mechanism might be stopped like a clock and set going again at will, providing that proper conditions are fulfilled. He had shown me a sprouting grain of wheat, taken from an Egyptian sarcophagus, in which the germ of life had lain dormant since the days of Pharaoh. He had told me of tropical animals found embedded in Arctic ice, whose flesh, protected from decomposition by the exclusion of atmospheric influence, was still edible—animals whose existence in those regions dated back to an epoch before the creation of man. One day he reproved me for laughing at the oft-told newspaper story—I read it from the *Times*—of a living frog discovered in a coal seam.

‘Why should you ridicule the things that seem improbable, Grey?’ he asked. ‘Can we imagine anything that may not be realized? The common facts of to-day were inconceivable to the imagination of a Shakespeare. The mind is not capable of such a leap—we move by steps so gradual and slow.’

By fortunate hazard Nicolas Van der Hoël had found in Andrew Lebrun not only a conscientious and earnest man of science to carry out faithfully the instructions he had left, but one whose studies and intellectual tendencies peculiarly fitted him to pursue still further the experiments of his predecessor. It was unlikely that the Dutchman had revealed the secret of the means by which he succeeded in arresting animation, but I had little

doubt that my master, after resuscitating Percival Somerset, had devoted his mind to the discovery of these means; and that he had succeeded was evident by this beetle in my hand, by the growing tuft of grass that moved him so strongly, by the pigeon that ultimately convinced him of the reliability of his process. Probably upon this shelf, quite close at hand, were the ingredients with which he had solidified a transparent liquid into the vitreous substance capable of maintaining a living organism in a state of absolute immutability for an indefinite period, and I could not doubt now that somewhere Daphne would be found embedded in this substance. The drug he had administered to her on that fatal night had not killed her, but merely deprived her of consciousness, and while in this comatose condition he had subjected her to the arresting process. The instructions pinned upon the bench bore a new significance. Possibly the sealed carboy contained the same preparation held in the bottle I had broken, and was intended for the dissolution of the mass encasing Daphne. The only mystery that now perplexed me was, where had he concealed her body? I could see no vessel in the place large enough to entomb even her slight figure.

It occurred to me that where he had found Percival Somerset, there he had hidden his daughter. Undoubtedly that place was clearly indicated in the Latin instructions of Nicolas Van der Hoël. With the vain hope that I might yet be able to make out some guiding words of that dead language, I re-

turned to the bench and pored again over the parchment. Turning the last page in despair, I found at the foot some lines written in another hand, written with less painful care, with odd flourishes and abbreviations, irregular and crabbed, but legible, because the words were in my own tongue.

It ran thus :

‘Spitalfields, *June 4, 1792.*

‘I, Percival Somerset, gent., being now in my right mind (though at my wits’ end), do hereby make this declaration for the satisfaction of Nicolas Van der Hoël, clockmaker, etc. To wit :

‘That having been brought to ruin by ill-luck at the gaming-table and other pleasant diversions of the devil, so that I have neither friends nor the money to make them, no means to live with pleasure to myself nor inclination to exist otherwise, I was this morning prevented from blowing out my brains by an alternative offered me by the aforesaid Nicolas Van der Hoël, which alternative is that I submit myself to a chemical experiment, upon certain conditions named by him, which may turn out to my great advantage. And seeing that this Dutchman is an honest man (and hath given me proofs of the safety and pleasant issue of his experiments), and that the sleep he proposes to put me to is more agreeable to my tastes than the putting of a bullet through my head, I do hereby, of my own free will and desire, submit myself to his operation, and desire all men to hold him irresponsible for the fatal consequences to myself that may follow. And to

this I put my hand in the presence of two independent witnesses, who shall sign their names hereafter.

‘PERCIVAL SOMERSET.

‘Witness { PETER SMITH, mariner.
JACOB LITTLE, shuttlemaker.’

The reading of this odd declaration served to confirm the belief I had already formed, but it gave me no clue to the one mystery I was burning to unravel.

Yet why, I asked myself—why was the parchment pinned on the bench, the carboy placed close at hand? Surely the hiding-place could not be far off if my conclusions were correct.

Suddenly, surveying the length and breadth of this bench, an idea occurred to me, and I tried the hanging iron handles of the drawers below, one after the other. Not one drew out—the drawers were false!

I caught hold of the heavy plank forming the bench on top and lifted it. It gave readily, and as it rose I perceived that the sham drawers were nothing but the side of a long deep chest, lined with lead. When the bench that formed the lid was thrown back against the wall, I found that the chest was filled to a height of about three feet from the level of the floor with the same vitreous-looking substance contained in the jar, and on the top, ready for use, lay a syphon, obviously intended to drain off the liquid as it dissolved.

The nature of the substance did not permit me to see more, but I knew now that Daphne lay entombed there, waiting to be awoke from her long sleep.

What was to be done now? Should I reveal my discovery to my friends? I shrank from the thought of telling Thérèse, for to me there was something terrible in this living death of her sister. It gave me the horrible impression of being buried alive to look down on that solid block and know that Daphne was within it. And then the fearful uncertainty of her resuscitation would be worse than the belief that she was already gone for ever.

Should I tell David Leigh alone? Undoubtedly he would be able to read the instructions, but would he consent to help me in carrying them out, with the awful possibility facing us of only partially succeeding in restoring life?

And Daphne, what of her? Was she to be given life only that her heart should break to find it was loveless? Oh! better for her, for all who loved her, that she should sleep on.

Yet, with the workmen coming to destroy the place, her body could not be left here. What was to be done?

I had not answered that question when the street bell rang, compelling me to quit the laboratory in haste to meet Thérèse.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

DAPHNE'S AWAKENING.

I WAS surprised to observe as I entered the shop that it was nearly three o'clock. I could scarcely believe it was so late, especially as Thérèse before going out had told Jane to prepare dinner by two.

Upstairs I found David Leigh alone, drawing off his gloves, with a preoccupied look in his face.

'Our dear friend has had a trying time, Grey,' he said in a low tone, after gently closing the door.

'We have seen Lebrun.'

'My old master?'

'Yes. I obtained permission last night. Many concessions have been granted to Lebrun, partly through an intimation from the Home Secretary that he is to be treated with leniency, and partly on the representation of the medical officer, who finds that the poor old gentleman's heart is affected and his constitution greatly shaken by the intense strain upon his mental and physical powers. A week ago he was told that Thérèse lived, and to prepare him still further for meeting her we were permitted to stand in the yard when the prisoners were being marched into chapel. They came out in a long, shuffling file, a set of leering, scowling, callous rascals, and amongst them the grand old chap stood out noticeably, like a lion in a pack of jackals. Nothing assertive in his manner, you know—no

assumption of superiority. Oh no ; he was remarkable simply by his personal attributes—his height, a certain natural dignity in his carriage, and the fine mould of his features.'

'He has not changed, then, greatly?'

'Oh, considerably since the day I first saw him at Park Lane—noticeably, indeed, since his trial. He seems to have no flesh at all. His skin has that fine semi-transparent quality that you sometimes see in consumptives, and those deep, dark, lustrous eyes, sunk deep in their orbits, yet quick still with energy, would terrify you but for the beatitude and patient sufferance of his expression.

'We were standing a dozen feet or so from the file as he approached. When he turned his head and caught sight of Thérèse, his face was transfigured with joy, and, passing the warder, he strode up to her and took her in his arms, the rules of a prison counting for nothing against the greater law of nature.

'Happily the governor was with us, and he, with a sign to the astounded warder, himself led Lebrun back to the file.

'“After chapel, Lebrun,” he said kindly.

'We saw him after the service, but then it was in the regular waiting-room, and we were separated by bars. It was touching every now and then to see the old man stretch his arms as if to reach his daughter. We spoke cheerfully of the future, naturally, and he showed no surprise to hear that he might be released before the summer comes.

“The doctor tells me I shall not live to go out if I don't eat,” said he, with a smile, “as if we lived by eating only. A man's will can do more than prison diet to make him outlive his term.”

“Poor papa ! you have need of philosophy now,” said Thérèse.

“A father should not be a philosopher,” he answered. “I have found that. One can't be both. Had I been simply a philosopher, or simply a father, I should not be here now. When I should have been a father I was a philosopher, and when I should have been a philosopher I was a father. That is my sole excuse for misjudging you,” he added, turning to me.

I seemed to see my old master saying these words.

‘If we had left then,’ continued David, ‘it would have been all right. We stayed just a few minutes too long, for suddenly, without warning, Lebrun implored me for Heaven's sake to obtain his release at once, and in a tone of almost frantic despair.’

‘What were you talking about at that time?’

‘Nothing of any importance. Thérèse had turned the conversation from the more serious subject and was talking about quite ordinary affairs. I hardly remember what item of gossip she was giving him—nothing more important, I think, than that notice from the inspectors to pull the house down.’

I started, understanding well enough the terrible fears this intimation must have conjured up in my master's mind.

‘I suppose,’ pursued David, who was looking on the ground, ‘that this sort of reaction is not uncommon to prisoners. The warders seemed to understand it, and closed our interview almost immediately, but as he was led away Lebrun still appealed to me to get his release. This has upset Thérèse, for it looks as if her father’s intellect, as well as his physical forces, is giving way.’

About six o’clock that evening we heard a vehicle pull up before the house, and the next minute the bell was rung. I went down, Jane having gone upstairs to prepare for church, and opening the door, found a warder there.

‘Is Mr. Grey at home?’ he asked.

‘My name is Grey.’

He nodded, and going to the four-wheeled cab drawn up by the kerb, he touched his hat, and, opening the door, said:

‘All right, sir. Mr. Grey’s in.’

Two gentlemen, who, I learnt later, were the doctor and the governor from the prison, stepped out, and after them, to my amazement, Andrew Lebrun.

They came into the shop as I turned up the gas, supporting Lebrun between them. He gave me his hand, and moved his lips to speak, but he was overcome with emotion, and sank heavily on the chair I placed for him.

‘Faithful—faithful always, John?’ he asked presently, stretching his hand towards the laboratory.

'It's as you left it,' I answered.

'Thérèse—where is she?'

She herself answered, running downstairs at the sound of his voice.

He rose and folded her in his arms, pressing his lips upon her brow in silence, as she murmured inarticulate sounds of love and joy.

The governor and the doctor were speaking in a low voice to David, who also had joined us.

'I have come, my child, to give you back your sister,' said Lebrun, in a low voice—'living, I trust. If dead, may God have mercy upon me and take me also.'

Then, summoning up his energies, he turned to me and said:

'Give me the keys, John.'

I went with him into the laboratory and lit the lamp, the others following, silent with mingled awe and incredulity.

I helped him throw back the cover of the chest, but under the stimulus of mental excitement he seemed now scarcely to need my help.

'She is here,' he said, turning to the governor.

The lamp was brought closer, the doctor examining the surface of the vitreous mass with professional interest, as Lebrun adjusted the syphon, the shorter limb entering a cavity made in the substance, the longer one descending to a grating in the floor outside. He paused for a moment, as if to collect all his vital energy, and then, taking a chisel from the shelf, he struck off the neck of the carboy. Together

we raised the vessel to the edge of the chest and tilted it. As the liquid flowed out the same phenomenon followed that I had noticed in the morning, the surface of the substance rapidly dissolving and throwing off a light vapour.

Watching the process with perfect self-command, Lebrun bade me exhaust the air from the syphon by the piston attached to it, and when I had done this the liquid flowed from the trough as rapidly as the substance dissolved.

With breathless eagerness we watched the rapidly-sinking surface, and presently a smothered cry, almost a cry of horror, escaped us as a tress of golden hair appeared. But Lebrun watched with unmoved countenance, intent on keeping the flow of liquid from the carboy equable.

Quickly as the words flow from my pen the dear face of our lost Daphne issued from the misty surface—her face as I had seen it last—rigid and white—and then her figure, still draped in the dressing-gown she wore that night. We looked on aghast, for to others, still more than to me, it appeared that Daphne was dead, and that this awful experiment was nothing but the proof of Andrew Lebrun's madness.

He alone was undaunted. He beckoned me to take the carboy and continue the process. When his hands were free he turned to the shelf and took down a long glass flagon.

The last drop of liquid was sucked by the syphon from the chest, and we lifted Daphne and laid her

upon the ground. Lebrun opened the flagon, and pouring something from it in the palm of his hand, passed it over Daphne's lips, her nostrils, and her temples. At this time the silence was awful. Lebrun's voice was the first sound that broke it.

'God be praised!' he cried.

I bent forward with an indescribable emotion, and not I alone, but all who stood there. There was colour in Daphne's cheek. Her lip quivered with a sigh like one waking from sleep. As the cries of wonder and passionate delight reached her ear, her eyes opened heavily, and she looked up at us with a faint smile, as if she were still dreaming. And after that one faint sign of intelligence, no longer than a ray of sunlight passing through a cloud-rift, her eyes closed again, as if she wished to sleep.

It seemed to us that this was only natural, that the return to life must be gradual, and we thought that presently she would open her eyes, and smile at us once more. But Andrew Lebrun, with his hand upon her heart, kneeling by her side, looking into that dear beloved face, cried:

'Wait for me, Daffy—my sweet, golden Daffy, wait for me! Only a little longer! I come—I come!'

And with the last word he fell by her side, his hand still upon her heart, his silver hair lying against the golden of his little Daffy.

THE END.

Telegraphic Address :
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July 1894.

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